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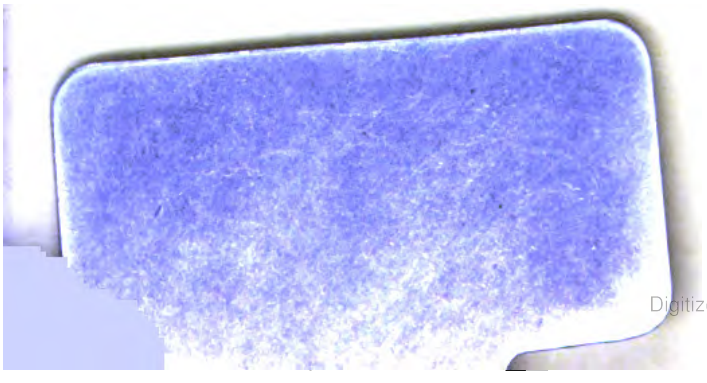
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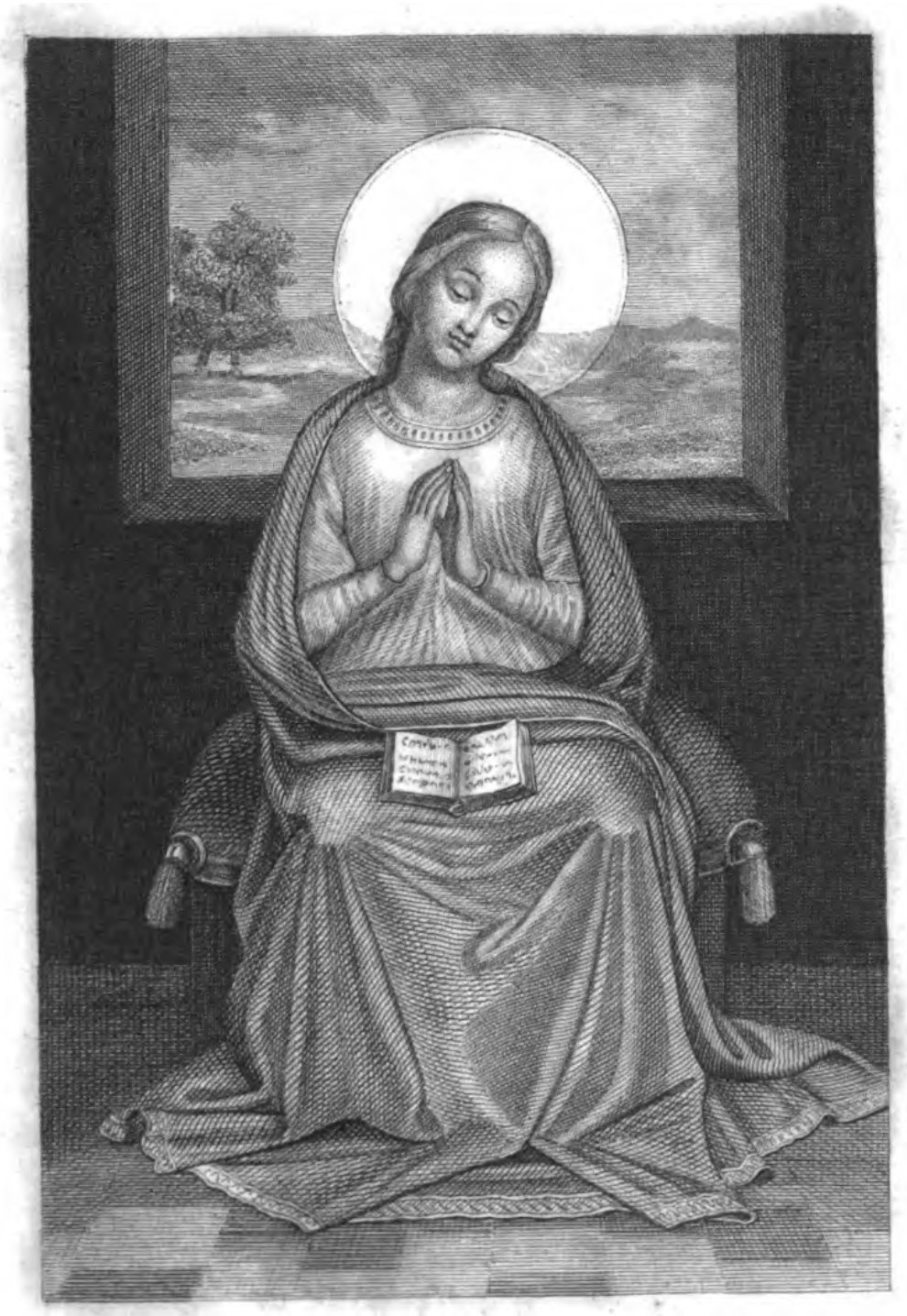


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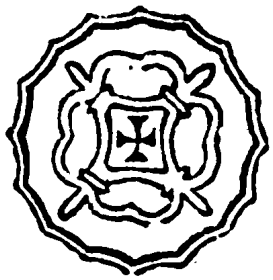
Attainment of our Last End.

BY

THE VERY REV.

FATHER JOHN BAPTIST PAGANI.

"In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."—Eccles. vii. 40.



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TO HIS DEAREST BROTHER IN CHRIST,

The Rev. Dominic Ceroni,

THIS LITTLE BOOK

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THE

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Part F.

CONTAINING VARIOUS CONSIDERATIONS ON OUR LAST END.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE NATURE OF OUR LAST END.

It is a property of all sciences that they are grounded on some solid maxim or general principle, which, when developed, becomes the source of several most useful and important truths. This property belongs to all human sciences, and extends also to that divine one which Holy Scripture calls "the science of the saints," because it regards the sanctification of our souls. The great maxim or principle upon which this heavenly science rests, is the object of our creation, or the end for which we are made.

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This end is the basis and ground-work of all supernatural wisdom, because all the maxims which have any reference to the perfection and sanctification of man, stand upon it, and derive from it all their weight and strength. "The end," says St. Hilary, "is the object towards which are directed all the affairs, hopes, and cares of men." The same was stated long before by Aristotle, who says, that the end is "the cause of causes, the rule, and as it were the helm and the centre of human actions." Hence St. Ignatius, in his Spiritual Exercises, calls the meditation on the end of man, the fundamental and principal meditation.

Now, as in a material building, it is to the foundation that we must direct our first and greatest attention, for it is upon this that the whole superstructure depends; so it is to the end or final destiny for which we were made, that we should turn our first and most serious consideration in the great work of building the edifice of our eternal salvation.

That we may deeply and thoroughly penetrate this most important truth, and lay it down as the foundation of our spiritual building, we shall here begin from

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the consideration of the work of our creation.

CONSIDERATION I.

On our Creation.

Consider what were you fifty, sixty, or eighty years ago? What were you during the lapse of nearly six thousand years, which the world has endured amidst innumerable transactions and revolutions? Alas! you were nothing; infinitely below the vilest insect that creeps upon the earth; infinitely less than the smallest grain of sand that lies upon the sea shore; infinitely beneath the most minute atom that is carried about by the wind. Yes, century after century has rolled on since the creating voice of God called this visible world into being; generation after generation has appeared upon the stage of life, and passed away; kingdoms and empires have arisen and exalted themselves to the highest pitch of power and grandeur, and then have crumbled into ruins, and still you were not, you had no being, no existence, you were not even thought of.

Who was it that created you? Who was it that drew you from your original

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nothingness, and brought you into existence? Who bestowed upon you that body, adorned with such noble powers, that soul, enriched with such exalted faculties, that life, endowed with such precious gifts? Ah! it was no other than God Himself, the omnipotent and eternal God, the sovereign Master of the universe, the great Lord of heaven and earth. Yes, it was neither angels, nor archangels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor cherubim, nor seraphim, nor any of the heavenly hosts that created you, but the eternal, self-existent, and infinitely blessed Lord is your Creator. "It is Thy hand, O Lord," says holy Job, "which made me, and created me."* "It was the Lord our God," says holy David, "that made us, and not we ourselves."†

By what power has God created you? What power did He employ to call you into existence? In order to create you, He called into action the whole infinitude of His unlimited power. For, since there is an infinite distance between existence and non-existence, so Almighty God, to compass His bountiful designs, and to bestow upon you that being which

* Job x. 8. † Psalm xcix. 3.

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you now possess, put into action the whole infinitude of His boundless and omnipotent power.

In what condition has God created you? Has He not placed you amongst the most noble, the most beautiful of His creatures? He might indeed, have made you void of sense and feeling; like the rude stones, or the trees of the forest; He might have created you without understanding or will, resembling the beasts of the field, or the birds of the air. But behold, He has created you to His own image and likeness.* He has raised you to the noble and exalted condition of a rational and immortal being, endowed with the power of enjoying endless beatitude; He has shed upon you a ray of His glory;† He has imprinted upon you a living stamp of His own divinity; He has made you a little less than the angels in heaven; He has crowned you with honour and glory, and placed you over all the works of His hands.‡

With what love has God created you? Here He has truly exhibited the tenderest love towards you, preferring you to

* Gen. i. 26.

† Psalm iv. 7. ‡ Psalm viii. 6.

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innumerable other creatures whom He might have called into existence, but whom He has left for ever buried in the dark abyss from which He drew you. His power, His glory, His essential beatitude would have remained the same, had He left you in your original nothingness. What right, then, what claim had you to receive from Him so excellent and so noble a being as you now enjoy? Ah! it was His goodness, His bounty, His love alone which induced Him to call you into existence. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," says our most gracious and bountiful Lord, "therefore I have drawn thee, taking pity on thee."*

Oh! how much I am indebted to Thee, my most tender and loving Father, my most bountiful and sovereign Lord, for having vouchsafed to call me into existence, and to bestow upon me such excellent and noble gifts. Would that I had made a good use of them. Would that I had faithfully corresponded to Thy bounty, by employing my life in serving and loving Thee, my first beginning and last end. But, alas! for, blinded by passion, and seduced by the allurements of pleasure, I abandoned the way of justice, and

* Jerem. xxxi. 3.

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chose to walk in the ruinous path of perdition! Alas! that instead of bearing the sweet yoke of Thy love, I turned my back against Thee, and sold myself to the devil, of whom I became a slave. Forgive me, O Lord, forgive Thy servant who is deeply grieved for having offended Thee, and firmly resolved to abandon for ever the ways of sin. If I have disgraced myself by sinful deeds, I still continue to bear the mark of Thy glory, the seal of Thy countenance; I am still the work of Thy bountiful hand. Do not reject me, therefore, from Thy face, nor deprive me of Thy grace. If, like the prodigal son, I have gone astray from my most bountiful and loving Father, now I return to Thee with an humble and broken heart, and beg to be received again amongst Thy children. Oh that I might spend the remainder of my life in serving and loving Thee with my whole heart, with my whole soul, and with my whole mind! I beg this grace for the sake of Thy infinite mercy, and for the merits of Thy divine Son, who expired on the cross for my salvation. Let His most precious blood, and His gaping wounds, plead my cause before Thy celestial throne, and intercede in my behalf. Come to my

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assistance, O holy Mary, and obtain for me the grace of loving now and for ever, you and my sovereign and bountiful Lord.

CONSIDERATION II.

On our Preservation.

Consider that not only have you received your being from God, but that you also depend upon Him every moment for its preservation. Each instant He renews, as it were, by His almighty power, the great work of your creation, sustaining you by His omnipotence, and preserving you from falling back into your original nothingness. You are in the hands of God much more strictly than was the Prophet Habacuc in those of the angel, when he was transported by him through the air from Judea to the lions' den at Babylon, wherein Daniel was confined. Imagine that you now behold the prophet hanging on high, and the angel upholding him by the hair of his head. Beneath him is the frightful den of the hungry lions howling for their prey. If the angel do but release his grasp, do but open his hand, the prophet will be immediately torn to pieces, and his life utterly destroyed. There is no

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need to hurl him down, his own natural weight will carry him to his destruction by the jaws of the lions, which, with their glowing eyes and awful roaring, are ready to devour him. This is indeed only a faint image of your condition as respects that omnipotent power which supports you. As you were drawn from the abyss of nothing by the all-powerful hand of God, so it is by the same omnipotent power that you are supported, and that you receive a new life every moment of your existence. "In Him we live," says the apostle St. Paul, "move and are."* If, therefore, God were for a moment only to withdraw from you His omnipotent hand, you would be instantly lost; you would suddenly fall into your original nothingness.

But that we may be able better to penetrate this important truth, and conceive a deep feeling of gratitude which we owe to God as our preserver; let us cast a glance on the face of the universe, and contemplate the number and variety of creatures which He has made for the service of man.

On looking above and around us we behold on every side such wonderful

* Acts xvii. 28.

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works, arrayed with so much wisdom, that we feel irresistibly moved to exclaim with the prophet Daniel: "O Lord, how great, how magnificent, are Thy works!" *Quam magnificata sunt opera tua Domine?* What an endless variety of creatures beatify this our place of exile! What an endless number of marvellous beings roll over our heads. Behold the sun, which proceeds like a giant in the brilliant sky, and communicates heat and life to all creation. Behold the stars and the moon which dispel the darkness, and lessen the horror of night. Behold the dew and the rain, which come down from the clouds to water and fertilize the dry and barren land. Behold the meadows clothed with grass, the fields enriched with abundant crops, the gardens adorned with flowers, the trees teeming with the most delicious fruits. Behold the animals which people the land, the fish which inhabit the waters, and the birds which fill the air with their melodious song. Look at the hills, the mountains, the plains, the valleys. the woods, which, with their beauty and fertility, procure nourishment and pleasure to man.

Now, for what purpose did God make

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all these things? For whose sake does He preserve them so carefully? Ah! blessed for ever Thou God of love, who to support my life, hast vouchsafed to bestow on me such wonderful gifts. Well might Thy holy prophet declare in accents of wonder that "Thou hast crowned man with glory and honour and, hast set him over the works of Thy hands." Ah! why am I not sweetly drawn to Thee by the sight of the innumerable objects which Thou hast created, and continue to preserve for me? Why do I not burn with love for Thee who hast imparted Thy gifts to me with such profusion? How can I be insensible to the voice which resounds through all creation, calling upon me to love Thee my Creator, my Preserver, and my Sovereign Lord? Ah! perish that day, be for ever forgotten that hour, in which I dared to offend against Thee! Blush, my soul, blush and be confounded for having been so ungrateful towards thy most affectionate Father, towards thy kindest benefactor. Away—away from me, ye treacherous objects, ye worldly vanities, which have seduced my heart into sin. I hate, I detest you, I am resolved to wage a constant war against you, and to

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consecrate all my heart and soul to the love of Jesus. It is enough what I have done in order to please you. I have been blind and wicked enough in turning my back against the fountain of living water, and in digging to myself a sinking marsh, full of filthiness and dirt.

Now I will put an end to my folly, and will follow the light of the wisdom of God. I will fly from sin as from the face of a serpent, and will walk faithfully in holiness and justice all the days of my life. Help me, sweet Mary, to obtain this grace from your divine Son, which I most humbly beg through the merits of His passion and death, and for the sake of the bitter sorrows which pierced your tender heart whilst you were standing beneath the cross, watching your agonising and expiring Son.

CONSIDERATION III.

On some weighty consequences which follow from the preceding considerations.

Reflect on the consequences, which flow from what you have considered above.

In the first place, since you were drawn from nothing, since originally you are

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nothing, do not arrogate to yourself any thing; take not pride in any gifts you may possess, esteem not yourself superior to others, but rather look upon yourself as a worthless being, and desire to be esteemed as such by all. "Why art thou proud, O dust and ashes?"* "What hast thou," says the apostle, "which thou hast not received? and if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received?"†

In the second place, since God has, in His infinite goodness, bestowed so noble an existence upon you, in preference to so many other creatures, whom He might have created in your place, you are under the strict obligation of showing to Him an endless and boundless gratitude for so great a favour. Be therefore thankful to the Father of mercy, to the Giver of every best gift, for having thus showered down upon you His choicest blessings; and say with the prophet David, "What shall I return the Lord for all His mercies and favours to me?"‡

3. Since, in the third place, you are endowed with the light of reason, and

* Eccl. x. 9. † 1 Corinth. iv. 6.
‡ Psalm cxv. 12.

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thereby elevated far above the rest of the visible creation, do not debase yourself to a level with the brute creation—degrade not yourself any longer to the rank of a dumb animal, by seeking after sensual gratifications, by following the bent of your unruly appetites; for "your body shall be a slave to your soul, and you shall have dominion over it."* Remember that "we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh, for if we live according to the flesh we shall die; but if by the spirit we mortify the deeds of the flesh, we shall live."†

4. Since, in the fourth place, you are created to the image and likeness of God, beware lest you disfigure or defile this sacred image by sin. Being, as you are, the offspring of God,‡ do not debase and degrade yourself by sinful actions; having been stamped with the resemblance of the Godhead, do not obliterate that sublime character, by defiling it with the foul stain of sin; but take care that the sacred image of the Deity, by which you are sealed, be duly honoured by the purity of your heart, by the rectitude of

* Gen iv. 7. † Rom. viii. 13.
‡ Act. xvii. 21

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your will, and by the holiness and sanctity of your life.

5thly.—Seeing that your soul, which God has formed to His own image and likeness, is immortal, that it will never die, that it is destined to live for ever, for an endless eternity, oh! do not fix your affections and desires upon the fleeting and transitory things of this life, but look forward to the house of your eternity, and labour to secure for yourself that immortal crown of glory which God has prepared for His faithful servants. Remember that "we have not here a lasting abode, but we are looking for one that is to come, which shall be eternal in heaven."* Forget not that we are but strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, that we are poor exiles in a foreign land; let us therefore long and sigh after our real home—after our true country: "let us seek the things that are above, and not the things that are upon the earth."† Despising the vanities and follies of this miserable world, let us fix our thoughts, our affections, and our desires, upon that city on high where our treasure is, where alone we shall find true peace and lasting happiness.

* Heb. xiii. 14. † Coloss. iii. 11.

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6thly,—Since God constantly renews in your behalf the work of creation by continuing to preserve you by His almighty power, you ought therefore to devote to Him all the faculties of your body, and all the powers of your soul, loving Him above all things, and spending all your life to His honour and glory. For it is but just that He who has planted the vineyard, and cultivated it with diligence and care, should enjoy the advantage of its fruits.

Ex toto se illum diligere debet, says St. Bernard, *cui se totum debere non ignorat.* A tree in the garden belongs entirely to its owner, who has a strict claim to all its fruits. The slave belongs entirely to his master, who has a strict right to his service. How much more, then, man, who has received all which he possesses from God, should belong entirely to Him, and employ in His service all his heart and soul?

Here enter into yourself, and examine attentively your past conduct. How have you acted towards your Creator and Sovereign Lord? Has your life been spent in honouring, or in offending Him? Have you chastised your body, and kept it under subjection, or have you indulged

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its base and degrading appetites? Have you faithfully walked in the path of justice with the saints, or have you sat in the seat of wickedness with the ungodly? Have you sanctified your life by offering it a holocaust to the living God, or have you polluted it by yielding to your inordinate passions? In a word, have you lived for Heaven, or for the earth, for God, or for the Devil? Alas! instead of living to God alone, have you not rebelled against Him, and outraged His tender mercy and infinite goodness in the vilest manner? Instead of loving and serving Him with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, have you not insulted Him most shamefully, by employing against Him those very gifts which He so bountifully bestowed upon you, to be employed solely to His honour and glory? Ah! why have you acted so basely and ungratefully towards your God, your Sovereign Good, your most gracious and merciful Lord? "If I am thy Father," says He by the mouth of His prophets, "where is my honour? and if I am thy Lord, where is my fear? Is this the return thou makest to me, O faithless and ungrateful soul? Is it thus thou repayest all the love which I have

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shown thee? What more could I have done to gain thy heart, to secure thy love? Have I not made thee out of nothing, in preference to many other beings which I might have created in thy place? Have I not watched over thee with the tenderest love, with the most untiring solicitude? Where, then, is the honour, where the homage thou owest to my majesty? Where is the love and gratitude due to my goodness? Ah! why hast thou forgotten me? Why hast thou neglected my benefits, and rebelled against me? Why hast thou turned away from me, who am thy true and only good? Alas! I have cherished thee, and exalted thee as one of my dearest children, and thou hast despised me. I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and thou hast returned me nothing but coldness and ingratitude."

Yes, it is but too true, my God, that I have been most ungrateful to Thy love. Covered with confusion at beholding my unworthiness, I dare not lift up my eyes to heaven. Hitherto I have done nothing but offend Thee, my God, my Father, my Creator, my Sovereign Lord—Thee who hast a thousand titles to my affection, and whom I ought to have loved

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with all my heart and soul. Blinded by my passions, I have loved vanities and pursued worldly deceits, but henceforth I will be all Thine. I promise that the remainder of my life shall be entirely devoted to Thy holy service and love. Oh! pardon my past folly, my wickedness, my ingratitude. Let Thy grace now superabound where sin has so long abounded. Oh! would that I had never offended Thee, my only and real good! Too late have I known Thee, O Ancient Truth! too long have I gone astray from Thee, O sweet and never-fading Bounty! Behold me now at Thy sacred feet, resolved by the help of Thy grace, to devote myself entirely to Thy honour and glory. I have said, now I will begin. Yes, let it be the change of the right hand of the Most High.

Hail! my sweet and most merciful Lord. I adore Thee, and give Thee Thanks, O Son of the living God, for having created me to Thy own image and likeness; for having made me capable of enjoying everlasting happiness. O Lord, my God, have mercy upon me! O grant that I may love and serve Thee, the only treasure of my soul.

Receive, O Lord, all my liberty, my

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memory, my understanding, and my will; all that I have, all that I possess, is the gift of Thy bounty. Behold I now restore all to Thee again. O grant me, dearest Lord, Thy love and Thy grace; with these I shall be rich enough, and will ask and seek for nothing more."*

O Mary! my sweetest Queen! thou, who art the Virgin Mother of my Creator, vouchsafe to look down upon me with eyes of mercy, and obtain for me the grace to serve and love thy divine Son, my Lord Jesus Christ, now and for ever. Amen.

CONSIDERATION IV.

On the End of our Creation.

Consider the end for which your bountiful Creator has drawn you out of nothing, and bestowed upon you that being which you now possess.

Why has God created you? Why has He so liberally enriched you with His choicest gifts, and placed you amongst the most noble, the most sublime works of His hands? As He is infinite in wisdom, He must have had some great object in view in all this. What, then,

* St. Ignatius.

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is the object, what is the end for which God has created you? Was it that you might merely run through the few fleeting days of this transitory life? Was it that you might be enslaved to the body, and indulge its sensual appetites? Was it that you might enjoy the deceitful goods of this earth? Ah no! you are created for a far nobler and greater end than can be found in the enjoyment of the vain and perishable objects of this world. For how can terrestrial things, which pass away quickly like a dream, and disappear like a shadow, constitute the end of an immortal soul, which is made to live for ever? It is a firm principle of Philosophy and Divinity, that the end must always exceed in dignity and value, those things which are ordained for its attainment. "*Finis,*" says Aristotle, "*est semper melior, et dignior ordinatis in finem.*"* And the reason is, because it properly belongs to the end to make perfect the things which are directed to attain it; and, therefore, the end must be something more noble and valuable than the things that are ordained for its attainment, otherwise they could not

* 2 Phys.

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derive from it any kind of real perfection. Following this principle, I ask again, how is it possible that the base and perishable goods of this earth, can constitute the end of your immortal soul, which is made to the image and likeness of God, and destined to live for ever?

Moreover, if the great object of your creation consisted in the mere enjoyment of earthly pleasures, in what, asks St. Augustine, would you then differ from the brute creation? "*Si hic esset finis tuus, quid amplius, haberes jumento?*" Are not all the beasts of the earth continually bent upon the indulgence of their sensual appetites? Are not all their desires fully satiated by the enjoyment of sensual delights? What greater advantage would then man have in this case above the beasts, which graze in the fields, the horse and the mule, which have no understanding?*

Finally, if the end of your creation did really consist in the enjoyment of earthly objects, how does it happen that their attainment does not satiate the cravings of your hearts, and make you truly happy? It being the essential

* Psalm xxxi. 9.

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property of the end to perfect those things which are directed to its attainment, it is evident that our end must necessarily be such as may satiate the desires, fill the heart, and bestow a full and perfect happiness on all those who attain to it. Our end is wished for by us, writes St. Thomas, as an object that will fully satiate our desires. "*Finis noster appetitur ut perfecte satians.*" But where shall we find, amongst terrestrial things, an object capable of filling the vast capacity of our hearts? of bestowing on us full and perfect happiness? Alas! the world, with all its vanities, far from being able to make us truly happy, can only increase our distress, and make us more wretched and miserable. We have as many instances and witnesses to this truth as there have been men, who have strayed from the path of justice, and given themselves up to the pursuit of earthly enjoyments. Their life is a striking proof of the great sentence of St. Bernard, that the goods of this world may flatter and deceive the heart of man, but can never satiate its desires, nor bestow upon it any real happiness.

Since, therefore, the enjoyment of earthly goods cannot constitute the end

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of man, where shall we find an object capable of doing this? Ah! raise your mind above all created things, and fixing it on those regions of eternal light, which God inhabits, behold there the great, the only object of your creation. "Man is created for this end," says St. Ignatius, "that he may adore, praise, and love his Sovereign Lord here upon earth, and enjoy Him hereafter in His eternal kingdom."* As the sun was created to give light, the fire to communicate heat, the water to refresh, and the earth to produce its fruits, so we are created to serve and love the Lord our God in this life, and to enjoy Him for ever in the life to come. "I am the beginning," says Almighty God, "and the end."† "Every one that calleth upon my Name, I have created him for my glory."‡ From the very first moment of our existence God has sealed us, as it were, with His own seal, has consecrated us to His own glory, and has imprinted in the very essence of our being those sublime words: 'The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him alone shalt thou serve."§ It

* Spiritual Exercises, first day.
† Apocal. i. 8. ‡ Isaias xliii. 7.
§ Matt. iv. 14.

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was not necessary that we should be called into being. The Supreme Deity might, without doubt, have left us for ever in our original nothingness; but since it has pleased His infinite goodness to draw us from thence, and to bestow upon us a rational and immortal soul endowed with a boundless desire of beatitude, and capable of knowing, loving, and possessing His infinite Majesty, He cannot possibly have done it for any other end but that we should devote ourselves to His service and love. Whatever, then, may be our state or condition of life, our first and only object must be that of loving and serving the Lord our God; that God of incomprehensible Majesty, from whose presence the heavens fly away, at whose voice the very pillars of the firmament are shaken, the powers of hell tremble, and the highest mountains melt as wax; that God of irresistible power, whom the waves of the sea, and the stars of heaven obey; that God of overwhelming glory, before whom the Angelic Hosts veil their faces, and the souls of the just made perfect cast down their crowns, and bowing in lowly adoration before His throne, sing eternal hymns of praise, honour, and glory; that God of

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infinite bounty, of whose mercies there is no number, and of whose goodness the treasure is infinite; that God of inconceivable beauty, the brightness of whose Divine countenance enlightens the heavenly mansions, and ravishes into ecstasies of love and eternal blessedness all the inhabitants of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Behold the great, the sublime end for which you have been made. Nothing can be more just, nothing can be more conformable to the dictates of right reason, nothing can be better adapted to the capacities of all men than this sublime end. The poor as well as the rich, the ignorant as well as the learned, the weak and infirm as well as the strong and healthy, are equally capable of attaining to it, and can neither plead any excuse, nor claim any exemption. To love and serve God is, properly speaking, the only thing which is necessary to man, the only business which ought to command all his care and attention, the only object which should employ his whole heart and soul. Blessed, therefore, is the man who directs all his efforts to the attainment of this his great end, and seeks, with all diligence and care, to love and serve his Sovereign Lord. He shall be like a tree

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which is planted near the running waters which shall bring forth its fruits in due season; his leaf shall not fall off, and all whatsoever he shall do shall prosper. But not so with the man who deviates from the end of his creation, not so; for he shall be like unto the dust which the wind driveth from the face of the earth.* "Whosoever," says St. John, "does not love the Lord his God, abideth in death."† "Whosoever does not love the Lord Jesus," says St. Paul, "is to be accounted as a reprobate, as an accursed."‡

Oh how great my folly was, my dear Lord, in losing sight of Thy love, and of thinking only to gratify my passions and to indulge my self-love. It is but too true that I have walked for many years out of the right path, loving vanity and seeking after a lie. It is but too true that I have wandered away from Thee, attracted by the allurements of the flesh, the illusions of the world, and the deceits of the devil. I acknowledge my blindness, and I should wish for tears of blood to weep bitterly over it.

Out of the depths of my unworthiness

* Psalm i. 4. † I. Joan. iii. 23.
‡ I. Corinth. xvi. 22.

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I most humbly cry out to Thee. O Lord, Lord, hear my voice. Let Thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it? Ah, remember that with Thee there is mercy, and with Thee plentiful redemption. Remember that I am Thine, and that Thou hast shed Thy blood to rescue me from the slavery of sin. Vouchsafe, therefore, my dear Lord, to pardon me, and to enrich me with Thy grace. Thou art "the way, the truth, and the life," direct my steps in the way of salvation. *Perfice grassus meos in semitis tuis.* I place myself into Thy hands as one blind, and beg of Thee to guide me safely through the perilous course of this life to the port of salvation. If Thou wilt me to be tried by crosses and sufferings, here I am; give me only Thy grace with Thy love, and I am rich enough, nor do I seek anything more.

CONSIDERATION V.

On a remarkable consequence which follows from the preceding consideration.

Having seen the sublime end for which you were created, reflect on a most

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serious and important consequence which follows from it. Since you have been made for this only end, that you may love and serve the Lord your God, you ought to devote to Him all your heart and soul, with all your faculties and powers, and that without any reserve. The love and service of God ought to regulate all your thoughts, to animate all your affections, to direct all your actions, to sanctify all your life. "Whether you eat, or drink, or whatsoever else you do, you ought to do all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,"* you ought to offer all to His greater honour and glory, you ought to consecrate all to His love and service. You ought to imitate in this point the prophet Jonas, who, being asked by the pilot of the vessel in which he was sailing towards Tarsis in Cilicia, who he was, and of what profession, from whence he came and whither he was going, gave him the following answer: "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord the God of heaven."† Sublime words! exclaims a holy Father: four questions are here put to Jonas, and he makes but one reply, but by this

* 1 Corinth. x. 31. † Jonas, i. 9.

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simple one he answers all of them. "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord the God of heaven," as if he had said, My whole profession, all my qualifications, my titles and endowments are comprised in these few words: "I am a servant of God, I fear the Lord." These are the sentiments which ought to inspire the Christian who knows that he has been created for the one great end of loving and serving his sovereign Lord. I am a servant of God, he ought to say; this is my name, my profession, my whole glory. My only business in this world is that of loving and serving the Lord my God with my whole heart and soul. Let others assume to themselves great titles, and glory in pompous names; let them be distinguished by the appellation of great, and rich, and powerful. I envy not their honours; my only glory is, that I am a lover and a servant of God.

Such ought to be the sentiments of every Christian. But, alas, how little do the generality of men think of their last end. When we look around us, and view the various pursuits of men, we behold them, with but few exceptions, engaged from morning till night in seeking after the riches and pleasures of this world, in

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grasping at mere toys and empty shadows, forgetful of the great end for which they were made, anxious only about the present, and careless of the future. Yes, scarcely if ever thinking seriously upon the object of their creation, they live not for heaven but for earth; their thoughts are fixed not on eternity, but on time; they labour, not to please God, but to gratify their passions. In vain does religion call them to more solid and more serious occupations; in vain does experience teach them that all is vanity excepting to love God and serve Him alone. In spite of all this, they forget their eternal interests, and bestow their principal care upon the vain and perishable goods of this life. When there is a question of obtaining some temporal advantage, they are most industrious, most active and vigilant; they boldly encounter the greatest difficulties, and willingly endure the severest hardships. But when there is a question of loving and serving their most bountiful Lord, when the question is of fulfilling their high destination, alas! they are feeble, cold, and indifferent; they are unwilling to endure the least labour, or to make the least sacrifice.

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Here turn your attention upon yourself, and examine most carefully the inmost recesses of your heart. What have you hitherto done in order to correspond to the goodness and liberality of God, who has made you for Himself, and desires that you should devote your whole heart and soul to His love? What have you done in order to attain to the great end for which you have been created? Have you been faithful in loving and serving the Lord your God? Have you not, on the contrary, spent the greatest part of your life in offending Him? Here humble yourself beneath the Almighty hand of God, acknowledge your own wretchedness, and resolve to spend the remainder of your life in His love and service.

I firmly believe, O most gracious and bountiful Lord, that Thou art my first beginning and last end. I believe that Thou alone deservest all my love, and that to Thee alone I ought to direct all the thoughts of my mind, all the affections of my heart, and all the actions of my life. Ah! may those ends which the world proposes to its followers find no place in my soul. May every other desire except that which has Thee for its object, be for ever banished from my

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heart. May all that the world esteems and loves become to me an object of hatred and contempt.

Oh, what goodness, what love, to have bestowed upon me so many favours, to have loaded me with so many blessings, to have made me for so sublime and perfect an end! What return shall I make to Thee, O Lord, for so much goodness? But, alas! how shamefully have I abused this Thy bounty and liberality, during the years of my past life! Instead of employing my heart and soul in praising, loving, and serving Thee, I have only made use of them to offend Thee, and to indulge my own unruly passions. Ah! my God, have pity on me, Thy hitherto ungrateful, but now repenting child! Oh, turn away Thy face from my sins, blot out all my past iniquities, and restore me once more to Thy favour. Henceforth I will live for Thee alone; Thou alone shalt be the God of my heart, and my portion for ever. As Thou art my first beginning, so Thou alone shalt be my last end, the only object of my love, my God, and my all. Oh! do Thou give force and efficacy to these my resolutions; help and support me by Thy powerful grace, that loving and serving Thee faith-

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fully on earth, I may one day have the happiness to see, to love, and to enjoy Thee for ever in Thy eternal kingdom. Assist me, O gracious Mary, in obtaining this grace from your Divine Son, and grant that I may live and die loving my most sweet and merciful Jesus.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE END OF THE VARIOUS CREATURES WHICH EXIST UPON EARTH.

Man has been created to the end that he might love and serve the Lord his God here upon earth, and enjoy Him hereafter in heaven. This is the great object of His creation, and whatsoever is not referred to this end is darkness and error, vanity and affliction of spirit. But what is the end of the other things which exist upon earth? Why has He called into existence all those various creatures which surround us on every side? This is a most important question which shall form the subject of the two following considerations.

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CONSIDERATION I.

The various creatures which exist upon earth were created to the end that they might assist man in attaining to his last end.

Consider how the various creatures which we behold on the face of the earth were created by God for the benefit of man; namely, that they might assist him in attaining his end, that of knowing, loving, and serving the Lord his God. "*Reliqua supra terram sita,*" says St. Ignatius, "*creata sunt hominis ipsius causa ut eum ad suum finem consequendum adiuvent.*"* "Thou, O Lord, hast subjected all things to man," writes St. Augustine, "that man might be wholly subject to Thee. Thou gavest to him dominion over all Thy works, that he might be wholly Thine. Thou didst create all external things for the use and comfort of his body; his body for the sake of his soul; his soul for Thyself, that it might seek Thee alone, delight in Thee, and love Thee alone."† Yes, whatsoever you perceive on the face of the earth, whatever

* Spirit. Exercises, medit. i.
† Soliloquies, chap. xx.

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exists within or without you, all has been created for your benefit, all is subservient to you, all is intended to assist you to raise your heart to God, and to secure the great object of your creation. All the creatures which surround you announce with mute but eloquent voice, the great Being who formed them, and exhort you to praise, and love, and glorify Him with all your heart and soul. "*Cœlum et terra et omnia mihi dicunt*," writes St. Augustine, "*ut amem te.*" "Ask the beasts of the field," says holy Job, "and they will teach thee; and the birds of the air and they will tell thee: speak to the earth and it will answer thee; and to the fishes of the sea, and they will tell thee."* God has spread over your head the spacious canopy of heaven, glittering with marvellous light, that you might be led to know and adore His immensity, His infinite power and majesty, and at the same time perceive and acknowledge your own nothingness. He kindled into light the sun, the moon, the planets, and the innumerable hosts of stars that gem the dark brow of night, that you might be excited to admire the glory of His

* Job xii. 8.

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eternal kingdom, that you might desire and sigh after the enrapturing splendours of His inaccessible light, and be brought to acknowledge and lament over your own darkness and ignorance. He commanded the earth to bring forth the countless variety and luxuriance of its fruits, that you might learn by this example, that you ought to produce those abundant fruits of sanctity which God requires from you, and that you might be moved to praise and adore His infinite goodness, and unbounded liberality towards you, and at the same time to detest your own baseness and ingratitude in making Him so ill a return for so much bounty. He, in fine, adorned this your place of exile with so many admirable creatures, that ascending as by so many steps, you might attain at length to the knowledge and love of Him, your only true and supreme good. And this truth extends to everything in this world; for whatever exists on this earth, sin only excepted, is intended by the gracious designs of Providence to be subservient to man for the attainment of his last end. Such is the object of all visible things; of riches and poverty, honours and contempt, health and sickness, pros-

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perity and adversity, and of all the various stations and conditions of life. Such is the purpose for which they were made; and when they shall have fulfilled this end, when they shall cease to be of any use to man towards the attainment of his eternal salvation, when man shall have passed the gates of death, and have entered into the house of eternity, then shall they return into their original nothingness. For, as the Apostle St. Peter says, "The heaven shall pass away with great speed, and the elements shall be melted with heat, and the earth, and the works that are in it, shall be burnt up."

I bless Thee, O Lord, and give Thee thanks for all the stupendous works of Thy infinite power and mercy. Ah! would that I had always corresponded to Thy goodness. Would that I had always aimed at Thy holy love. But, alas! instead of this, I have sought my own pleasure, and abused Thy gifts. Thou hast encompassed me all around with blessings, that I might be urged and assisted by them to raise my heart to Thee, and I, with a black ingratitude, have despised Thy bounty, and turned Thy gifts against Thyself. I have sinned,

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O Lord, I have sinned, what shall I do to make atonement for my sins? O! Thou who camest into this world to save poor sinners; Thou who didst shed Thy blood and lay down Thy life on the tree of the cross, to rescue poor fallen man from the power of hell, grant me, I beseech Thee, an intense sorrow for my sins, that I may weep over them till the end of my life. Mary, refuge of sinners, intercede for me, and obtain for me this grace from your divine Son.

CONSIDERATION II.

On a most important consequence which arises from the preceding consideration.

Consider a most important consequence which follows from what has been stated above. Since the various creatures which exist upon the earth were made for your benefit, and are intended by Providence merely as means for the attainment of your last end, you ought consequently to value them only as such, and employ them only as far as they can assist you to love and serve the Lord your God. "*Utendum illis,*" says St. Ignatius, "*vel abstinendum eatenus est, quatenus ad prosecutionem hujus finis*

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vel conferunt vel obsunt." On this point you ought to imitate a pilgrim journeying on his way towards his native home. How does he conduct himself when returning from a long and painful exile? As his wearied steps approach to his dear native country, however delightful the objects may be which meet his gaze in the various countries through which he passes, he only admires and makes use of them, as far as they can assist him in pursuing his journey, and give fresh vigour and strength to his exhausted frame. So, in the same manner, you who are but a pilgrim in this land of misery, seeking another and better country, must value creatures and make use of them only as far as they will help you to advance towards your true country, the heavenly Jerusalem. The children of this world are, generally, led by self love, or by a desire of gratifying their sensual appetites, in the use which they make of created things; but you, whose greatest glory should be that of being a child of light, ought to act in a very different manner. The principle which ought to guide you in making use of created things, should not be, whether they will procure you any gratification,

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but whether they will better advance you in the love and service of God, and aid you to secure your eternal salvation.

Thus, for example, if you perceive that a thing will be beneficial towards enkindling in your soul an ardent love of God, and in helping you to attain eternal life, Oh! like the merchant in the gospel, go and sell all you have and purchase that rich treasure, whatever it may cost you. But if, on the contrary, you perceive that a thing, instead of aiding you to gain the great end of your being, is rather a dangerous obstacle to it, if you see that it is calculated to make you deviate from the path of justice, or prevent you from devoting your heart unreservedly to God's holy love and service, Oh! then remember that it is your strict and bounden duty to reject it, to fly from it as from the face of a serpent, to abandon it, however pleasant and delightful it may appear to you, even though it be as dear to you as your right eye, or your right hand or foot. Such is the doctrine of truth itself: such is the injunction of our divine Saviour, which we must obey if we would save our souls. "If thy right eye scandalize thee," says He, "pluck it out, and cast it from thee; and if thy

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right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee."* Hence the only question we ought to put to ourselves, is not whether a thing will be to us a source of consolation or affliction, whether it will bring us comfort or distress, whether it will procure for us honour or disgrace; but whether it will assist us to love God or not, whether it will help us to secure our eternal salvation or not. On such occasions we ought to say with St. Aloysius, "How will it assist me to attain eternal life?"

Here recollect your thoughts and examine your own conduct on this subject. How have you hitherto acted with regard to created things? what has been the rule which you have followed in making use of them? Have you always kept before your mind the great maxim of using them only in as much as they can assist you in attaining to your last end?

Ah, dear Jesus! how much it grieves me when I consider my wickedness and my folly in misusing Thy gifts, and making them instruments of sin. Alas! How ungratefully I have abused Thy goodness and liberality. Thou hast set me over

* Matt. v. 29.

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the works of Thy hands that I might be helped by them to glorify Thee, and attain my sublime destination, and instead of this, I have employed them for the indulgence of my passions, and for the gratification of my unruly appetites. Forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and grant me the grace of walking in holiness and justice all the days of my life. Oh, when shall I attain to the blessed lot of despising all things, to love Thee alone, my sovereign good and my whole? When shall my soul, subdued by Thy beauty, become a prisoner of love? When shall I die to all the world, to live to Thee alone? O love all powerful, complete thy triumph over this unworthy creature. Mary, mother of fair love, warm my heart with a spark of that blessed fire which consumes your own.

CONSIDERATION III.

On another most important consequence which follows from the preceding consideration.

Consider another weighty consequence which follows from what has been declared above. Since created things possess no intrinsic merit in themselves,

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and are only valuable inasmuch as they are serviceable to us for the attainment of our end, it follows that we must endeavour to render ourselves indifferent concerning them: so that we should not wish for one more than another, unless we see that it will be of greater assistance to us in advancing in divine love, and in securing our eternal salvation. "*Debemus*," says Ignatius, "*absque differentia nos habere circa res creatas omnes, et ex omnibus ea demum quæ ad finem nostrum ultimum melius nos ducunt eligere ac desiderare.*"* We are not to be blamed if we feel naturally inclined to some particular object; but as far as regards our own free will we ought to endeavour to keep our minds in a state of perfect indifference to all human things, so as not to prefer one thing to another, unless we perceive that it will be more conducive to the end for which we were made. Our great anxiety ought to be, to love and serve our most sweet and bountiful Lord; but as to the manner of accomplishing this, we ought to abandon ourselves unreservedly to divine Providence, without the least predilection for one thing more

* Spirit. Exercises, medit. I.

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than another. Hence, as long as we do not know whether health or sickness, riches or poverty, honour or ignominy, a long or a short life, will be more useful to us in working out our salvation, we must keep ourselves in a state of indifference respecting them, and then only should we choose one thing in preference to the other, when we perceive that it is better calculated to help us to love God, and attain to the end of our being. Such is the philosophy of the gospel. Such is the wisdom of Christ, in comparison of which, the wisdom of this world is nothing but darkness and ignorance. Oh! that all Christians were deeply impressed with these sublime principles of Christian justice, and made them the rule of their conduct through life.

It is related in history, that Martin Olevius, a most celebrated doctor of divinity, and one who was looked upon as the luminary of the university of Paris, having spent one hour in the meditation on the end of man, and of the various creatures which are made for the benefit of man, he was so struck by the heavenly light which he received during this meditation, that he openly declared he had learnt more from that simple considera-

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tion, than from all the studies he had made for many years on theological subjects.

It is also related, that in a certain convent at Rome, there was a nun called Bonaventura, who gave the greatest disedification and scandal to the whole community, by her vanity and worldly spirit. So little love and relish for spiritual things did she manifest, and so contrary was her conduct to the holiness of her sacred profession, that when the venerable Father Lancicious was coming to give a retreat in that convent, she opposed it, expressing the greatest dissatisfaction, and openly declared that she would not assist at it. At last, overcome by the fervent entreaties of her saintly companions, she consented to join the community in their holy exercises. The Father began as usual by the meditation on the end of man, and of the various creatures made by God for his use. This meditation, to which Bonaventura happened to listen with the greatest attention, sank so deeply into her heart, and produced such a wonderful impression on her soul, that as soon as the Father had finished, she hastened to him, and bathed in tears, cast herself at his feet, exclaim-

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ing: "Father, I have lived long enough for the world, I have been too long ungrateful to my loving and bountiful Creator; I now see for what I have been made, and what God requires of me. I am determined, then, to become a saint, and a great saint, and that as soon as possible." Having taken St. Catharine of Sienna, for her especial patroness and model, she advanced so rapidly in the way of perfection, that at the end of one year, she had the happiness of dying in the odour of sanctity. Oh! would to God that this great truth, might produce similar effects in the souls of all those who meditate upon it!

I thank Thee, O my dearest Lord, for having provided me so abundantly with means to work out my salvation. Oh! that I had always availed myself of them, in order to love Thee, and secure eternal life! But alas! instead of using them to raise up my heart to Thee, and render Thee that homage of adoration and love which is due to Thy infinite majesty and goodness, I have used them only to offend Thee, and to bring ruin upon my soul. Ah! have pity on me, dear Jesus, and grant me grace to atone for my past offences, and to repair my long ingrati-

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tude to Thee. Grant that I may love Thee with my whole heart and soul for the future. It grieves me that I have offended Thee, O my God. I am penetrated with confusion and sorrow for what I have done, and am firmly resolved, with Thy holy assistance, to amend my life. If hitherto I have mis-employed Thy creatures, I am now resolved to love them only in Thee and for Thee. Instead of using them as means to indulge my passions, to insult Thee by sin, as I have too often done, I will henceforth employ them solely to please Thee, in the exercise of every virtue, and in labouring to gain eternal salvation. In making use of them I will never forget Thee, their Giver. I will keep my thoughts and affections fixed on Thee, and will avail myself of them only to increase still more and more Thy holy love in my soul. Oh! I love Thee above all things, my sweet and bountiful Jesus, and am resolved to live and die in Thy holy love. Oh! let me be stript of all rather than be deprived of Thy love: let me lose everything rather than forfeit thy friendship. Yes, dear Jesus, take me out of life, rather than suffer me to offend Thee any more, and to lose Thy love. O sweet

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Mary, come to my assistance, and obtain for me the grace never more to be separated from the love of your Son Jesus.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE EXCELLENCE OF THE END OF OUR CREATION.

THE meditation upon the end of our being is one of the most powerful remedies, one of the most efficacious preservatives against sin. "Remember thy last end," says the Holy Ghost, "and thou shalt never sin."* In all thy works consider from whence thou art come, why thou art living, and whither thou art going, and thou shalt keep thyself free from sin. Of the great Father Pallavicini, the celebrated writer of the History of the Council of Trent, we read, that for two-and-twenty years he daily meditated on this most important truth. Such was the practice of all the saints, whose greatest delight was to meditate in solitude and silence on the end of their being, to reflect continually for what purpose they had been placed upon this

* Eccle. vii. 40.

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earth, what was the great object of their creation. As the Pilot who is sailing upon a stormy ocean, in a frail vessel, in order to avoid the danger of shipwreck, keeps his eye continually fixed upon that small light that glimmers like a distant star from the beacon towers through the darkness of night over the roaring billows, directing him to the port he seeks, so the saints continually keep before their view the great end towards which they are journeying, lest wandering from their course, they should perish amidst the rocks of temptation that beset their pathway to eternity. In conformity to the practice of the saints, you will here consider in this chapter the excellence of the end for which you have been made. This consideration will help you to labour earnestly for its attainment. For as the soldier fights with greater ardour and strength when he reflects that his own honour and glory depend upon the victory; as the merchant labours with far more diligence and care to secure the success of his speculations, when he knows that his own fortune, happiness, and prosperity will result from them; so will you be excited to strive with greater earnestness, to secure your eternal salva-

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tion, when you discover the value of the prize for which you are coutending.

CONSIDERATION I.

The excellence of our last end is shown by the effect which Divine love produces in our souls.

Holy faith, as well as reason, teach us that God is the centre of all perfection, and that every thing which exists, whether in heaven or upon earth, whatever be its nature or condition, has no perfection of itself, but has received from God whatever worth or excellence it may possess. From this principle it clearly follows, 1st, that God alone is the source of all true excellence: 2nd, that our excellence increases in proportion as we approach nearer to God. Keeping these two rules before your mind, consider the excellence of your end.

You have already seen that you have been made for the purpose of loving and serving the Lord your God faithfully here upon earth, and enjoying him for ever in His eternal kingdom. What, therefore, properly constitutes the end of your creation, is the perfect love and enjoyment of God. Now, what is the nature and

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essential property of divine love? How does it act upon our souls? We know from the doctrine of faith that the principal property of divine love is that of uniting us to God, so as to make us "dwell in Him," as the Scripture says, "and Him in us." "God is charity," says St. John, "and he that dwelleth in charity, dwelleth in God, and God in him."* "If any one love me," says our blessed Saviour, "he shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and we will come to him, and will take up our abode with him:† and speaking to the Samaritan woman, He calls the love of God, "a fountain of living water springing up to eternal life."‡ By which words he signifies that the essential property of divine love, is to raise up and unite our souls to God, until they attain eternal life. The union which is effected between our souls and God by divine love, is real and substantial, and implies a kind of possession of God Himself. By the love of God the heart may be said to be opened and enlarged; and being distended as far as it is possible to our finite nature, it partakes of the perfection and of the

* 1 John iv. 16. † John xiv. 21. ‡ John iv. 14.

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nature of the object it loves. The Scripture speaking of sinners, says, that "they are corrupt and become abominable in their ways: that they are become abominable like those things which they loved;"* which signifies that they become similar to the objects of their love. In the same manner it may be asserted that the lovers of God become amiable and perfect, like the object of their affection. Hence, St. Augustine went so far as to utter that sublime sentence: "Each person is such as is the object of his love. Dost thou love the earth? Thou art earth. Dost thou love God? What shall I say? Thou shalt be God."

Poor worldlings, blinded by their passions, and deluded by the false maxims of a corrupted world, imagine that true excellence consists in possessing unbounded wealth, in enjoying a high reputation before men, in acquiring extensive learning, and in attaining to great honour and glory. But, alas! the time will come when they will discover their fatal delusion, when they will perceive to their most bitter anguish that there is indeed no real excellence to be found—except

* Osea ix. 10.

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in loving God; that man's true and highest dignity is to be attained only by the love and the service of the great God who made him. "Let not the wise man," says Almighty God, by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, "glory in his wisdom, and let not the strong man glory in his strength, and let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me."* In the gospel of St. Luke, we read that the disciples of Christ, having returned from their mission full of joy on account of the great works which they had performed in His name, and particularly of the wondrous power they had exercised over unclean spirits, our blessed Saviour thus spoke to them: "Behold I have given you power to tread upon scorpions and serpents, and upon all the powers of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you; but yet rejoice not in this that spirits are subject unto you, but rejoice in this that your names are written in heaven."† By which words our Saviour teaches us that nothing in heaven or upon earth is so sublime, so worthy of our esteem as our

* Jerem. ix. 23. † Luke x. 20.

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last end, and that our greatest glory ought to be that of loving and serving the Lord our God faithfully during this present life, that so we may enjoy Him for ever in His heavenly kingdom. Think upon this, O my soul, and be ashamed of thyself at the consideration of having squandered away the greatest part of thy life in offending God, instead of attending with all possible care to His service and love. What did it profit thee to have gratified thy passions and indulged the wicked desires of thy heart? What did it avail thee to have satisfied thy own fancy, thy own caprice, instead of following God's holy will, and seeking after His love? Alas! the momentary pleasure was soon gone, and the remorse and the shame of the evil deed still remain. Thou wert called to an intimate union with the centre of all good, with the source of all perfection, but instead of attending to this thou hast degraded thyself to the level of the irrational beasts. Now enter into thyself and beg of God to forgive thee thy past folly, and to pardon thee all thy sins. Covered with confusion prostrate thyself before His presence, and beseech of Him to enkindle in thy heart the fire of His holy love.

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Behold, O dear Lord, behold at Thy feet a miserable sinner who craves for Thy mercy and love. I know that by my sins I have lost all claim to Thy grace. I know that I deserve to be punished most severely, and to be cast away for ever from Thy face. But where shall I turn, my most sweet and bountiful Lord, if I am rejected by Thee? Ah! for mercy's sake, do not reject me, O Lord, otherwise I am lost. Do not cast me away from Thy face; nor take away from me the gift of Thy holy grace. Cleanse my soul from all iniquity, and make me walk faithfully in the way of Thy commandment. Strike my heart with Thy holy fear, and inflame it with the fire of Thy love. Oh that I might forget all earthly objects, and concentrate all my affections and thoughts in Thee alone! Oh that I might separate myself from all creatures in order to be perfectly united to Thee, my joy, my consolation, my treasure, my all. Give me the grace, O Lord, that I may despise this miserable world, and seek only for the things that are above. Grant that I may trample under foot whatever passes with time, and pursue with the greatest ardour what is eternal. I beg this grace for the sake of Thy divine Son, who ex-

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pired upon the cross for my salvation. Come to my assistance, O holy Mary, and help me by your intercession.

CONSIDERATION II.

The excellence of our last end is shown by the sublimity of the state of glory.

That you may be able to comprehend more clearly the excellence and sublimity of your last end, elevate your thoughts above all visible objects, above all terrestrial things, represent to your mind the ravishing spectacle of the heavenly Jerusalem, as seen by St. John, and contemplate the exalted position of those blessed spirits who surround the throne of God, singing eternal hymns of love and adoration to their sovereign Lord. Oh! would that the golden gates of that celestial city could be thrown open to your gaze, that you might behold the sublime, the stupendous glory of the souls of the just made perfect! Would that, like the enraptured St. Paul, you might be ravished, though but for one moment, into that glorious kingdom, that so you might see with your own eyes, with what honour and glory God clothes His elect! for what mortal tongue can ever describe the glo-

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ries of this city of God! Amongst men, to be elevated to a royal throne, to wear the kingly crown, is considered as the highest dignity, as the summit of honour and glory. But in the heavenly Jerusalem all are princes, all are kings; for as St. Augustine says, "there are there as many kings as blessed inhabitants:" each one is seated on a lofty and brilliant throne, and crowned with a diadem of refulgent glory. Oh! what greater honour can we imagine than this, to be made partakers of that same glory, that same dignity and honour which God Himself enjoys? Miphiboseth was overwhelmed with astonishment on his being allowed to sit at the royal table with David; but how far greater is the honour shown by God to His elect, when He not only makes them to sit down at His table in His kingdom, but as He declares, He Himself passing, will minister unto them.* What greater dignity can we imagine than that of being the friends and favourites of God, of reigning for ever with Him as princes of His heavenly kingdom, of being for ever occupied in singing His praises, in contemplating and enjoying His ado-

* Luke xii. 37.

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rable perfections? And yet such is the sublime destiny to which you are called. Yes, you also have been created for this exalted end, that you might, together with those blessed spirits, contemplate, love, praise, and enjoy the God of all glory, the Lord of all majesty, for an endless eternity. This your corruptible body, which at present so much weighs down the soul, is destined to be hereafter crowned with honour and glory; to be clothed with incorruption and to shine like a brilliant star for all eternity. "It is sown in corruption," says St. Paul, "it shall rise in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it shall rise in glory; it is sown in weakness, it shall rise in power."* And your soul, your immortal soul, which at present groans in captivity under the heavy weight of its mortal flesh, is destined to soar on high into those regions of eternal light, there to join the choir of angels and saints, to see God face to face without veil or shadow in all the splendour and majesty of His divinity, to reign eternally with Him, and to possess a glorious a never-fading crown of glory. Yes, such is the noble, the exalted, the sublime destiny for which you have been

* 1 Corinth. xv. 42.

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created: you have been made for the same glorious end as the highest cherubim, the most burning seraphim: nay, you have been created for an end which is common to our blessed Lady, to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, to God Himself; for the essential perfection and beatitude of God consists in this, that He knows and loves Himself with a boundless and infinite love. Hence it is, that St. John tells us "that we shall be like unto God when we shall see Him as He is."* Oh! who does not feel enraptured at the thought of so noble, so exalted an end? Men are accustomed to look with a kind of wonder and admiration upon the children of kings and emperors, who are destined to inherit the crown and sit on the throne of their parents, they honour and revere their dignity, and envy their exalted lot. But, Oh! how far more exalted and sublime is that destiny towards which faith directs your view, when it assures you that you are destined to reign for ever with Christ in the kingdom of His glory. "Come, ye blessed of my Father," will Jesus say to His elect on the day of judg-

* 1 John iii. 2.

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ment, "come and possess the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."* "The Lord shall enlighten them," says St. John, "and they shall reign for ever and ever."

Admire, then, your exalted dignity, acknowledge your sublime end; and since you are destined to be raised to so intimate an union with the God of all majesty and glory, to join the heavenly hosts, to reign with Christ in His eternal kingdom, O beware lest you debase yourself by turning your affections to the vain and despicable objects of this earth. Being created for so noble, so sublime an end, despise this miserable, this transitory world, trample under foot its foolish vanities, detach yourself from all created things, and devote your whole heart and soul to the love and service of your God. Imitate the saints, who looked with the utmost contempt upon all created objects, and placed all their glory in the love and service of God. "What have I in heaven," says holy David, "and besides Thee, what do I desire upon earth? the God of my heart, and my portion for ever."† "I count all things as dirt,"

* Matth. xxiii. 34. † Psalm lxxii. 26.

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cries out St. Paul, "that I may gain Jesus Christ."* And the seraphic St. Francis continually exclaimed, "My God and my all, my God and my all." "Let the learned," says St. Paulinus, "enjoy their learning, let the rich possess their riches, and kings their kingdoms; but for my part Jesus Christ is my wisdom, my riches, my kingdom, my all." Like these lovers of God, join even whilst upon earth, the angelic choirs in adoring the infinite majesty of God, like them devote yourself entirely and unreservedly to His love. Prostrate in spirit before the throne of God, cry out with the four ancients of the Apocalpyse, "Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory, and honour, and benediction, for ever and ever. Amen."†

Yes, my dear Lord, I bow down most humbly to adore Thy infinite Majesty, and acknowledge that Thou deservest all my love. If I had a thousand hearts, it would be but a little tribute were I to consecrate them all to Thy service and love; for even after this I should be very far from loving Thee as much as Thou deservest. How can I then refuse

* Philip. iii. 8. † Apoc. ii. 12.

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to offer Thee my poor heart? How can I refuse to love Thee with all my strength? Come, Holy Spirit, and fill my soul with Thy celestial fire: as Thou didst once descend upon the apostles, and didst inspire them with the most fervent love, so vouchsafe to descend upon me, and to warm my heart with Thy celestial flames. Grant that I may despise all worldly vanities, and seek to please Thee alone. Oh that I might be consumed for the love of Thee, who hast vouchsafed to sacrifice Thy life, and to be consumed on Calvary for the love of me. I don't care for honours or earthly pleasures, but I am most anxious to attain to the inestimable treasure of Thy love. Treat me, therefore, as Thou pleasest, but give me the grace of living and dying in Thy holy love. I hope to obtain this grace by the merits of Thy passion, O dear Jesus, and by your intercession, O Virgin Mary.

CONSIDERATION III.

The excellence of our last end ought to induce us to set the greatest value upon it, and to use our best efforts in order to secure its attainment.

Our blessed Saviour tells us in the

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gospel, that a man having found a treasure in a field, hid it, and for joy thereof, went and sold all that he had and bought that field. He also tells us that a merchant, who was in search of good pearls, having found one pearl of great price, went his way and sold all that he had and bought it.* By these two parables our blessed Saviour teaches us to set the highest value on our last end, and to endure any labour, to undergo any privation, to suffer any pain, to make any sacrifice in order to attain it. For where shall we find in heaven or upon earth, anything equal to it? Is it not a treasure of inestimable value, a pearl of the greatest price? What are all the riches, all the treasures of this world, when compared with it but filth and dust? Who, then, will be so blind and so foolish as to slight this great treasure, and to neglect to purchase it at whatever price? Who will be so senseless as to pursue an empty delusive good, when he has it in his power to obtain a perfect, an infinite, an eternal one? But alas! how little do the generality of men think of securing the possession of this so excellent, so inesti-

* Matt. xiii. 45.

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mable a treasure! Oh! ye children of men, how long will you be hard of heart! How long will you love vanity and grasp at mere shadows! What excuse can you allege for your blindness in neglecting the love and service of God? Who can say that it is not in his power to attain to his noble and sublime end? As regards temporal goods it may be said with truth, that it is not within the reach of all to attain to them. In fact, how many do we behold who, notwithstanding all their efforts and anxious endeavours to raise themselves from their state of poverty to one of affluence, are left in their misery, without being able to improve their condition in the least? How many do we behold struggling with all their power to attain to an honourable station, and who, after all their efforts, are unable to fulfil their desires? But it is not so when there is a question of attaining to the love of God: for this most precious and exalted treasure can be obtained by all who sincerely desire it. "To secure this," says St. Augustine, "it is enough if you have an earnest and sincere wish to acquire it." "*Velis et poteris.*" At this very moment if you will but turn yourself to

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God, and resolve sincerely to devote to Him your heart and soul, you shall begin to secure to yourself the attainment of so great a good. "*Ecce dum loquor muta cor et fiet tibi.*" Speaking to the young man in the gospel, our Saviour said: "If thou wilt be perfect;"* in order to shew us that the attainment of our end, the acquisition of divine love, depends on our own will. The answer of St. Thomas of Aquin to one of his sisters may well be applied to every Christian. She asked him: "How she could save her soul." He replied: "by willing it." If you truly and sincerely desire it, you will be saved; for Almighty God, who is infinitely good, never fails to help us, but is ever ready to assist and strengthen us by His grace.

Since therefore, every one has it in his power to attain to his sublime end, what excuse can we allege before the tribunal of Christ, if we do not attain to it? Ah! woe to that Christian who leaves this vale of tears, this scene of probation, this place of trials, this field of battle, unprepared, and appears before his eternal Judge after having led a life of sin,

* Matt. xix. 21.

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and neglected the attainment of his great end! Oh! truly it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in that awful day, than for that wretched, that miserable soul!

That you may escape the fearful confusion that awaits the wicked in that tremendous hour, resolve to attend with all possible diligence to the securing of your last end. Let it be deeply impressed on your mind that nothing can be found so noble and sublime, nothing so excellent and exalted as to love God here upon earth, and to enjoy Him hereafter in His eternal kingdom. If you are sincerely determined to use your best efforts to obtain it, you may rest assured that you shall secure it. "Wisdom is glorious," says the wise man, "and never fadeth away, and is easily seen by them that love her; she prevents them that covet her, so that she first sheweth herself unto them. He that awaketh early to seek her, shall not labour...for she goeth about seeking such as are worthy of her, and she showeth herself to them cheerfully in the ways."*

Here reflect upon yourself, enter into

* Wisd. iv. 13.

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the recesses of your own heart, and see whether you have entertained for your last end that high esteem which it so well deserves. Cast a glance back upon your former life, review your past conduct, and see what labour you have undergone, what pains you have endured, what trials you have suffered, what sacrifices you have made in order to attain to this your sublime destiny. If, on examination, you find that you have strayed from the path of justice, and sought after mere vanities, instead of labouring to secure your great end, humble yourself before Almighty God, and, filled with contrition, say:

O my God, behold me at Thy sacred feet full of confusion and sorrow at the thought of my past ingratitude and neglect of Thy holy love! Thou hast called me into existence, and placed me amongst the most noble of Thy works; Thou hast formed me for an end the most exalted, the most sublime. Thou hast made me for Thyself, that I might love and enjoy Thee, my God and my all. But, alas! forgetful of this my noble destiny, I have forsaken Thee, my only good, and fixed my heart and my affections upon creatures! I have despised Thy love and

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Thy friendship, and run after mere illusions! Like the prodigal son, I have abandoned Thee, the best, the most loving of Fathers, and sought for happiness in a far distant land, in the region of death, in the tabernacle of sinners! Such, O my God, has been my past life, but behold now, O my most loving and merciful Lord, behold now at Thy feet, Thy ungrateful but peninent child! O turn not away Thine amiable face from me on account of my sins! Remember I am still Thy creature, the work of Thy hands. Have pity therefore on me according to Thy great mercy. Do Thou, who art the way, the truth, and the life, direct my wandering feet back to Thy fold. O receive me once more into the number of Thy servants, for I have said Now I will begin. Ah! had I died whilst I was in sin, I could never have loved Thee more, or thanked Thee for having borne with me until now. How often didst Thou call upon me to give Thee my poor heart, and miserable wretch that I was, I gave it to creatures. But, O Lord, it shall be so no longer; behold me now ready to do Thy will, to love Thee alone. My heart was made for Thee, and in Thee alone can it find repose; Thou

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alone art its centre, its peace, and its felicity. Oh, accept Thou of my cold and frozen heart, take it and warm it with Thy consuming charity; grant me grace to love Thee alone for the future, be Thou the God of my heart and my portion for ever.

O holy Mary, mother of pure and holy love, obtain for me the grace to love my God, to love Him alone, and to direct every thought, word, and action of my life to His honour and glory.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE HAPPINESS WHICH ATTENDS THE ATTAINMENT OF OUR LAST END.

Man is created with an irresistible desire, an insuperable longing, an earnest seeking after happiness; this feeling is implanted in his very nature, and he can never eradicate or destroy it. He may indeed deliberate concerning the means of becoming happy; he may follow his own judgment in the choice of the object by which he hopes that this happiness

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may be obtained; but he cannot deliberate or have any choice as regards his longing desire, his ardent thirst after happiness. For this desire, this yearning, is so deeply impressed in the very essence of our nature, so firmly rooted in our very being, that it is utterly impossible to destroy it, or to prevent ourselves from feeling it.

Such being the nature of man, there must of necessity be some object capable of making him truly happy; for it is absurd to suppose that God has implanted any desire in the nature of man which He has also not enabled him to fulfil.

Where then shall we find this object? How shall we attain to our true happiness? "Delight in the Lord," says holy David, "and He will give thee the requests of thy heart."*

CONSIDERATION I.

On the impossibility of attaining to any real happiness by means of earthly enjoyments.

"Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord," exclaims St. Augustine, "and our

* Psalm xxxvi. 4.

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heart can never rest until it rest in Thee."+ Consider, O christian soul, that the world with all its vanities, is utterly incapable of satisfying our longing desire after happiness. To be convinced of this truth, cast a glance upon the lovers of the world, and behold the misery and wretchedness they endure in the midst of all their fancied pleasures.

The miser, who fixes all his thoughts and affections upon his heaps of gold, is never satisfied with what he has got, but continually hungers and thirsts after more; and although possessed of the treasures of a kingdom, he still labours to add to his store. The voluptuary, who gives a loose reign to his unruly appetites, and seeks for happiness in the unrestrained indulgence of his inordinate passions, is never satiated with what he enjoys, but the more he wallows in the mire of impurity, the more he feels a void within himself, and the more ardent is his longing for something better. The same happens to the ambitious man, who seeks for happiness in the acquisition of earthly honours; for his thoughts are always directed more towards what he

+ St. Augustine.

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still wants, than to what he has already acquired. Who was more ric, glorious, and powerful than Solomon? He was the greatest king on the face of the earth, raised to the highest pinnacle of human grandeur, admired and praised by the whole world for his wondrous wisdom, favoured with the most abundant riches, and blessed with a prosperous and peaceful reign; and as regards earthly enjoyments, he confessed that he refused no indulgence to his senses. "Whatever my eyes desired," says he, "I refused them not."* Who would not have said that he was the happiest and the most fortunate of men, if the enjoyment of worldly goods were capable of making man happy? Yet he himself tell us that he found in all these things nothing but vanity and affliction of spirit. After having denied himself no gratification which his heart could desire; after having enjoyed the choicest and most exquisite delights which the world can bestow upon its followers, he most solemnly declared, that, far from having derived from that corrupt source any solid satisfaction or true happiness, he found nothing therein

* Eccl. ii. 10.

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but bitterness of heart and anguish of soul, sorrow and affliction of spirit.*

Behold again the renowned Alexander the Great. The whole known world was subject to him. With the aid of his valiant warriors he had defeated the monarchs of the earth, and dispossessed them of their vast dominions. The whole earth bowed down in admiration of his name, and Kings and Princes humbly followed in his train. But did this vast extent of power and glory satisfy his ambitious soul? So far from it, that it is said he wept like a child because he could not extend his conquests to another world. Thus leaving us a most convincing proof, that man was not made for the vain and deceitful enjoyments of this earth.

That you may be the better convinced of this truth, enter into your own heart, and ask yourself whether you have ever found true peace and contentment in the ways of sin? whether you have ever enjoyed real happiness in the love of creatures? whether you have ever satisfied the boundless desires of your immortal soul with the pleasures of this world,

* Eccl. ii. 17.

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with the indulgence of your unruly appetites? Alas! instead of peace and happiness, you have found nothing but gall and bitterness, nothing but trouble and distress, nothing but heart-rending sorrow and remorse. Though like the mighty Solomon, you should have enjoyed every delight which unbounded riches and power could procure; though like him you should have refused yourself no indulgence that your heart could desire; yet what was your actual state after all? You cannot but remember too well, that, like that unhappy king, you found nothing but vanity and affliction of spirit. Perhaps you had anticipated, like the Prodigal Son, that you should find perfect happiness, when you could drink without control of the intoxicating cup of sensual enjoyments, freed from the restraint of virtue, at a distance from your father's house. But, alas! have you not, like him, drunk deep instead of the cup of sorrow? Did you not, like him, groan in cruel slavery, under the worst of tyrants? were you not compelled to seek to satisfy your raging hunger with the kusks of swine? Yes, no sooner did you fly from the protecting arms of your loving Father; no sooner did you abandon

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your peaceful home, that early paradise of a virtuous life, than anguish and trouble followed your wandering steps, and darkness more fearful than that which wrapped Egypt in gloomy night for three whole days, enveloped your soul, whilst God's holy grace was banished from it. It is true, my dear Lord, it is true that, far from deriving any real comfort from earthly enjoyments, I found nothing therein but bitter anguish and affliction of spirit. Blinded by the enemy, I let loose the reins to my unruly passion in the expectation of happiness. But, alas! a sad experience has taught me that the world with all its vanities can only flatter and deceive us, but it cannot bestow upon us the slightest degree of real happiness. The cup which it presents to its followers to drink, that cup which is so dazzling to their eyes, and so fascinating to their corrupted heart, is a treacherous cup which, under its charming appearance conceals a fatal poison, the poison of death. Ah, woe, woe to them who approach their lips to that accursed cup! For, notwithstanding its apparent sweetness, it will spread the worst of pains into their soul, and will fill their hearts with anguish and despair.

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CONSIDERATION II.

On the happiness which attends the attainment of our end in this life.

Come to me, says our blessed Saviour, all ye that labour and are heavily burdened and I will refresh you.* Consider, christian soul, the great happiness which is to be found in the pure and perfect love of God. When divine love reigns supreme in the heart of man, it diffuses through all the faculties and powers of his soul a most precious balm of heavenly sweetness, which is utterly unknowntc the lovers of the world. It sweetens all the rigours and austerities of penance and mortification, and renders the yoke of Christ pleasant, and His burden light and easy. Those indeed, who blindly rivet their hearts and affections to the toys and trifles of this transitory life, are unacquainted with the heavenly power of divine love. But give me one, says St. Augustine, who in reality loves God, and he will bear testimony to the truth of what I say: "*Da amantem, et sentit*

* Matt. iii 6.

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quod dico." We have as many proofs and witnesses of this great truth as there have been saints in the Church of God, in whom the blessed fruits and happy effects of divine love shone forth conspicuous during the course of their mortal life. "Blessed are they," says our divine Saviour, "that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled." Truly happy are they who hunger and thirst after justice, after holiness and sanctity, for they shall be replenished with the abundance of God's house, with every spiritual blessing: yes, truly happy are they who nobly scorn, despise, and trample under foot all the riches, honors and pleasures of this world, and follow with generous ardour and fervent love, the sweet attractions of their most bountiful Lord; who fly from the base solicitations of their infernal enemy with horror as from the face of a serpent, and walk with persevering fidelity in all the commandments of their Lord. Thrice happy they, who crucifying their unruly flesh with its vices and concupiscences, glory, with the great St. Paul, in nothing save in the cross of their Lord Jesus Christ; who eagerly prefer the thorny crown of their suffering Jesus, to all the regal

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diadems and flattering joys of this earth; whose delight is to tread the rugged path that leads to Calvary, bearing their cross after their loving Saviour, who use this world as though they used it not, and count all things as dirt to gain Christ. Oh! how pleasing, how glorious in the sight of God and His holy angels, is the life of the crucified lovers of Jesus! What peace, what consolation does not the true lover of Jesus experience under the heaviest crosses and most trying afflictions of his earthly pilgrimage! What overflowing joy and delight does he not feel when he beholds his earthly tabernacle falling to pieces, and when he is about to quit for ever this land of exile, this place of banishment, and appear before Him after whom like the wearied hart, he has so long sighed, his God and his all! When called to depart from this world of sin, this vale of tears, this sea of misery, and to enter into the joy of his Lord, Oh! then he exults and rejoices at the things that are said to him, that he is to go into the house of the Lord, the Heavenly Jerusalem, the City of peace! where there shall be no more mourning, nor weeping, nor sorrow! Yes, precious indeed in the sight of the

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Lord is the death of His saints, "for the torment of death shall not touch them." God was their portion during life, and He shall now be their exceeding great reward for a never-ending eternity. Oh! that all men would know and understand this momentous truth! Oh! that all poor mortals could taste but for a little while the sweetness of divine love! O ye sons of men, why do you run blindly after empty unreal joys? Why do you set you affections on the fleeting and perishable goods of a deceitful and treacherous world? "Oh! come and see, and taste how sweet, how loving the Lord your God is, how good to all that love Him."* He is the only real, solid, and substantial good that deserves to be loved, or that can fully satiate the boundless desires of your heart. He is the source of all goodness, and the centre of all happiness. He is an overflowing ocean of all sweetness, of all joys, of all delights. All that is beautiful, lovely, and delightful in the whole creation flows from Him, as the rivulet flows from its spring, or as the rays of light proceed from the sun. How long then

* Psalm xxxiii. 9.

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will you continue to harden your hearts, and waste your love upon the wretched toys, and trifles of this earth? How long will you be so infatuated as to abandon the source of eternal life, and wallow in the muddy streams and putrid mire of sin? Why do you seek at a distance from God, those goods of body and mind which can be found only in Him? Oh! turn your back on the deceitful objects of this world, and seek after God alone, who is the supreme good, in whom alone is to be found every other good. *Quære unum bonum in quo sunt omnia bona.*

Here I am at Thy feet, O most bountiful Lord, to thank Thee for having spared me so long, and to entreat Thee to give me the grace of employing the remainder of my life in Thy service and love. Let the men of the world seek after honours, pleasures, and riches; I don't care in the least for these contemptible things, and feel only anxious to acquire the invaluable treasure of Thy love. O that I might divest myself of all affection for creatures, and aim solely to please Thee. Vouchsafe, O dear Lord, to wound my heart with a dart of Thy love, and to draw me to Thy bosom by the sweet attraction of Thy grace. My earnest desire

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is that of dying to all created things, and of living to Thee alone. Grant, O Lord, that I may redeem the time which I lost in the pursuit of vanities, by redoubling my efforts in loving Thee, so that my life may become a perfect and continual holocaust to Thy divine majesty. I am aware that of myself I can do no good; but trusting on the strength of Thy grace, I hope to wage a perpetual war against sin, and to enkindle ever more and more in my heart the fire of Thy holy love. Accept, O blessed Lord, these my desires, and grant that I may fulfil them. I ask this grace, by the merits of Thy bitter passion, and death. I call for your assistance, O holy Mary, and beg of you to present my petition to your divine Son, and to obtain from Him the grace of ever burning with His holy love.

CONSIDERATION III.

On the happiness which attends the attainment of our end in the life to come.

"I will be thy reward," said God to his servant Abraham, "exceedingly great."* Consider that the happiness

* Genes. xv. 1

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which attends upon the love and enjoyment of God, is to be found in all its fulness and perfection in the kingdom of Heaven. So great, so intense are the joys of that celestial City of God, that they entirely fill and satiate all the powers and faculties of the blessed, who are continually plunged, as it were, in a boundless and fathomless ocean of pleasures and delights. "I shall be satiated," says holy David, "when Thy glory shall appear."* The Apostle St. Paul, who by a special privilege of God, was admitted to enjoy a foretaste of the joy and happiness of heaven whilst yet upon earth, assures us "that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man ever been able to conceive what God has prepared for those who love Him."† So unbounded, so intense is the joy of the blessed, that if the reprobate in hell could but receive one particle of it, their abode of misery would be changed in a moment into a paradise of delight. Oh! what happiness to partake of the same glory, to sit at the very table of God Himself, to drink at the same fountain of delights, to sit on His very throne!

* Psalm xviii. 15. † 1 Corinth. ii. 9.

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"You shall eat and drink," says our blessed Lord, "at my table in my Kingdom."* "I will give you to sit with me on my throne."† What happiness to see God Himself face to face, to gaze on that infinite, that increated beauty, to behold Him who forms the bliss of angels, without veil or shadow in all the splendour and majesty of His glory! What happiness to possess, to enjoy for eternity that Almighty Being who made heaven and earth, that God of infinite majesty, so wonderful, so incomprehensible, so ravishing; that beauty so ancient and yet so new, which fills with unceasing love the highest Cherubim and Seraphim! So wonderful, so entrancing are the perfections of God, that the saints declare that if He were only to manifest one single perfection at a time, He would ravish the blessed with ecstasies of delight for an endless eternity. Oh! then, what a happiness must it not be for us to see, to possess this God of infinite majesty, and to contemplate at one and the same time all His inexhaustible perfections! Ah! well might holy David say, that the blessed "are inebriated with the plenty of God's house."‡

* Luke xxii. 30. † Apoc. iii. 21. ‡ Psalm xxxv. 9.

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Behold the happy lot of the faithful servants and lovers of God! Behold the great, the intense, the inconceivable happiness which attends the attainment of your last end!

Here enter into yourself, and bewail your blindness and folly in having sought for happiness in anything else except the fervent love and service of God. Believe firmly that "all is vanity of vanities," except loving God and serving Him alone. "It is vanity to seek after riches which must soon perish, and to trust in them. It is vanity to be ambitious of honours, and of raising one-self to a high station. It is vanity to follow the lusts of the flesh, and to desire that for which you must afterwards be grievously punished. It is vanity to wish for a long life, and to take little care of leading a good one. It is vanity to attend only to the present life, and to neglect to look forward to those things which are to come. It is vanity to love that which passes speedily away, and not to hasten where joy remains everlastingly. Often reflect upon that proverb, *the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.* Study therefore to withdraw your heart from

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the love of visible things, and to turn yourself to things invisible."*

Ah! let tears gush forth from my eyes, as from two overflowing springs! Have mercy on me, O Lord, have pity and compassion on this miserable and wretched sinner! Pardon my folly, my wickedness, my ingratitude, of which Thou alone knowest the excess. I believe, my dear Lord, that Thou art the source of all happiness, that Thou alone canst give true rest to my soul, and Thou alone canst satiate the boundless desires of my heart and make me truly happy. Oh! that instead of offending Thy infinite majesty, I had always loved Thee, and fixed my heart and my soul on Thee alone! Now I am fully determined to love Thee alone in life, in death, and in eternity. Trusting in the powerful aid of Thy holy grace, I promise that nothing henceforth shall be able to separate me from Thee. I renounce with all my heart, all worldly vanities, and most solemnly declare before heaven and earth, that henceforth Thou alone shalt be my treasure and my all. Vouchsafe, O dear Lord, to confirm these my resolutions,

* Kempis, book i. c. 1.

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and grant that I may faithfully fulfil them, even until death. Inflict upon me any punishment Thou pleasest, but never permit me to be separated from Thee. "*Ne permittas me seperari a te.*" I am ready to receive any chastisement from Thy hand, provided I may have the grace of always adhering to Thee, and of never deviating from the path of Thy holy love. Give me Thy grace, together with Thy love, and I shall be rich enough, and seek for nothing more. O, Holy Mary, Mother of fair love, intercede for me before the throne of your divine Son, and obtain from Him the grace of burning for ever with the fire of His heavenly love.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE OBLIGATION OF ATTENDING TO THE ATTAINMENT OF OUR LAST END.

It is related in the Gospel of St. Luke that our Redeemer having entered the town of Bethany, a certain woman nam-

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ed Martha, received Him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sitting at the Lord's feet, listened to the words of heavenly wisdom that fell from His sacred lips, treasuring them up in her heart. But Martha was busy about much serving, to prepare an entertainment for her Divine guest; and seeing that her sister had left her to labour by herself, she said to Jesus: "Lord, hast thou no care that my sister hath left me alone to serve? Speak to her therefore that she help me." And the Lord answering said, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her."* Now, what is this one thing which, according to our beloved Saviour's doctrine, is necessary for man? What is this one thing so essentially, so absolutely requisite for man to gain? It is that thing for which alone he was called out of nothing, and placed upon this earth; that for which alone the omnipotent hand of God continually upholds his mortal existence; namely, the attainment of his last end, the gain-

* Luc. x.

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ing of that crown of eternal glory prepared for Him in Heaven. Yes, this is the one thing necessary, the only thing which is deserving of his supreme care and attention, as it will be shown by the following considerations.

CONSIDERATION I.

The Contemplation of the divine as well as of the human nature, shows the obligation which we have of attaining to our last end.

Whether we consider the nature of God, who is the Father of light, and the Giver of every best gift, or whether we reflect on the nature of man, who of himself is a mere nothing, and depends on God for every thing he possesses, it is manifest that God has the strictest claim to our service and love, and that we are strictly bound to serve Him with all our strength, with all our heart, and with all our soul. For if a son is bound by every law, human and divine, to love and revere his parents; if a servant is obliged in justice to serve his master with fidelity; if a subject must obey and revere his king; how strict,

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how binding must be our obligation of serving, loving, obeying, and revering the Lord, who is our God, our heavenly Father, our Sovereign Master, our great, and glorious, and immortal King? This duty, this obligation is as essential to us as our own being, as natural to us as our own life, as certain as our own existence, as ancient as the world itself. It was not necessary that we should be called into existence: but since it has pleased Almighty God to draw us out of nothing, and to bestow upon us a being little lower than that of the angels, it is absolutely necessary that we should devote ourselves, with our whole heart and soul to His love and service. "Fear the Lord," says the Holy Ghost, "and keep His commandments, for this is the all of man."* If this be the all of man, remarks St. Jerome on this passage, whoever neglects to love and serve the Lord his God, whoever fails to labour to secure that great end for which he was created, is a worthless being, not deserving to be called, or worthy to be accounted, a man. Of what use would the sun be, if it gave no light? Where would be the utility of the

* Eccli., xii. 13.

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fire, if it communicated no heat? To what purpose would the earth serve, if it ceased to yield its fruits? Would they not all become useless and worthless beings, not fulfilling the purpose of their creation? The same also is to be said of that man who neglects to attain to the end of his existence, and fails to love and serve his sovereign Lord. Whatever may be his situation and condition of life, whatever may be the rank he holds in society, whatever may be the reputation he enjoys in the opinion of men, if he labours not to secure the great end of his existence, if he neglects to love and serve his Sovereign Lord, he becomes a useless being, an unprofitable creature, deserving only to be looked upon with horror and contempt. Though he should distribute all his goods to the poor; though he should possess the gift of working miracles, so as to be able to remove mountains; though he should speak like an angel from heaven; though he should deliver his body to be burnt; yet, if he neglect the one thing necessary—the attainment of his last end—he is accounted as nothing, as a monster in creation; he is to beregarded merely as a fruitless tree, which encumbers the earth

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in vain, and is fit only to be cut down and cast into the fire; or as a barren field which, yielding nothing but briars and thorns, is fit only to be cursed and cast out to destruction. "I am the true vine," says our blessed Lord, "and my Father is the husbandman. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. If any one abideth not in Me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire and he burneth."*

Here stop, O Christian soul, and be astonished at beholding the folly and blindness of those men, who are fascinated by the allurements of passion, lead a most wretched and disgraceful life as if they had no duty of loving God, but had been created merely for the enjoyment of beastly pleasures. What will avail them, all their labours and sufferings, since they are neglecting the only object of their existence; and are thus cut off from the source of every good? Alas! they are like wandering stars, deprived

* John, xv. 6.

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of light, and only fit for eternal darkness.

Oh, what a subject of shame and confusion it is to me, O dear Lord, when I consider the many years which I spent in the pursuit of vice, entirely forgetful of Thy love. Alas! how could I be so blind as to turn my back to Thee, who art an infinite good, in order to run after empty vanities, and to enjoy a few filthy pleasures? Ah! it grieves me to the heart, my dear Jesus, when I think that I squandered away, in offending Thee, so much of that precious time which should have been totally employed in Thy service and love. Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on me, and forgive my sins. If, for the past, I have shaken the sweet yoke of Thy love, and have prostituted my heart in loving filth and dirt, now I am resolved to devote my entire being to Thy holy service, and to seek in all things Thy pleasure, and the fulfilment of Thy holy will. Strengthen, O Lord, by Thy grace, this my resolution; grant that I may subdue my passion, and overcome every obstacle which may impede its execution. Let this my heart, which was made for Thee alone, renounce every other affection but that which

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tends to Thee, and admit no other flame but that which burns for Thee. Happy me, if I can but free myself from all earthly ties, and love all things in Thee and for Thee alone, according to Thy most holy and adorable will. I expect to obtain this great blessing, by the merits of Thy bitter passion, and by the intercession of Thy blessed mother, the holy Virgin Mary.

CONSIDERATION II.

The obedience which other creatures render to God, according to their nature, shows the obligation which we have of attaining to our end.

To understand better how necessary it is for man to love and serve the Lord his God, and thus to attain his end, observe, O Christian soul, how all the various creatures which adorn this visible world, whatever be their nature and condition, join together, according to their powers, to render homage to their Creator. "The heavens above," says holy David, "proclaim His glory, and the firmament shows forth the works of His hand."* The sun that

* Psalm, 18.

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shines so brightly over all the earth, and runs with exultation its giant course; the moon that moves so majestically in its silvery path, enlightening the darkness of the night; the planets and countless hosts of stars, that roll so wondrously above, in the unmeasured realms of space, obeying the laws imposed upon them by their Almighty Architect, when He first launched them forth on their stupendous course; all these form but one harmonious concert of continual praise and adoration to their great Creator, never for a moment deviating from the one fixed end of their being. "Heaven and earth," says St. Augustine, "proclaim aloud the majesty and glory of their Maker with united voice, and cry out to us that we are indispensably bound to love Him with our whole heart and soul." The seasons that in unvarying order succeed each other at their appointed time; the mountains that are clothed with driven snow in the cold of winter; the meadows that smile with beauteous flowers in the gentle spring; the fields that abound with hopeful crops in the sultry summer; the trees that are laden with abundant fruits in the lovely autumn; all sing forth the

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praise of their Sovereign Lord, all constantly obey His holy will. And wilt thou alone, O man, refuse thy tribute of praise and adoration of thy God? Wilt thou alone shake off the yoke of submission to His adorable will, and raise up a proud rebellion against thy Maker? Thou who hast a being so noble, so excellent, so highly favoured, so wonderfully exalted? Thou whom God has made the lord of all the visible creation, and placed over the works of His hands? Wilt thou be so ungrateful, so wicked, as to forget thy Creator, thy first beginning, and thy last end? Wilt thou be so faithless and blind as to deny Him that tribute of service and love to which He has a thousand claims? Ah! no, my God! Preserve me from so great a crime, from so fearful an evil; for woe to that man who hardens his heart against the voice of truth and the sense of duty! Woe to him who neglects to love and serve the Lord His God; for the vengeance of God shall at last fall upon him, and he will be cut down and cast into the fire to burn without end. Permit not, dear Lord, that such a fearful misfortune should fall upon me. Permit not that I should have any part in the awful sentence

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which Thou shalt pronounce against the wicked, when Thou shalt cast them away from Thy face into everlasting fire; but let me rather have part in the happy sentence which Thou shalt address to Thy elect, when Thou shalt call them to the possession of Thy eternal kingdom. Let me burn here upon earth with the flames of Thy love, that I may be preserved hereafter from the eternal flames of hell. Speak to my heart, O merciful Lord, and make known to me Thy holy will. Pour down Thy Holy Spirit upon my soul, and make me walk faithfully in the path of Thy commandments. Enlighten my mind, inflame my will, that I may know the extent of my obligations, and fulfil them. Oh, that I had never offended Thee! Oh that I had always lived up to my high destination, by directing my labours, and employed all my life to Thy service and love. But since I have had the misfortune of grievously displeasing Thee, now I detest from my heart my sins, and am ready to make atonement for them. Trusting on the strength of Thy all-powerful grace, I declare that neither persecution, nor tribulation, nor life, nor death, nor any other creature whatsoever,

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shall be able to separate me from Thy love, which is in the Lord Jesus.

CONSIDERATION III.

The strict obligation of attending to the attainment of our last end, is exhibited to us by our Saviour's injunction, which is contained in the Gospel.

But what still more plainly shows the strict obligation under which we are of attending to the attainment of our last end, is the command imposed upon us by our Saviour in the Gospel in these words: —"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind."* Such is the command which the incarnate wisdom of God was pleased to deliver to us. A command the most perfect, since it comprehends the whole man, with all his faculties and powers. "No part of man," says St. Augustine, "is excluded from this duty of loving God; but the whole man, with all that he possess, must become a prey to the fire of divine charity." This fire, which is enkindled in the heart, must spread around

* Matt. xxxii, 27.

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on every side its blessed flames, and invest all the powers and faculties of man, so that he may at length say with the Apostle St. Paul, "I live now; not I, but Jesus Christ liveth in me."* A command the most reasonable, the most just; for what can be more just than that the creature should worship his Creator, that the subject should serve and love his Sovereign Lord? A command the most honourable for man, for what can be more glorious than to serve a God of infinite majesty, to serve whom, as the Scripture says, is to reign? A command, in fine, the most salutary, the most beneficial to man, since every blessing, both for soul and body, for time and eternity, depends on its observance. Hence the Holy Church, from a thousand altars, each day repeats those beautiful words, "It is truly meet and just, right and salutary, that we should always, and in all places, give thanks to Thee, O Lord God."† But, alas! how is this precept fulfilled by the generality of men? If we examine the conduct of all around us, how many shall we find who truly and sincerely love and serve their God, who make this the principal object of

* Galat. ii. 20. † Preface of the Mass.

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their lives? "God," says the Royal Prophet, "looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that understand or sought the Lord." And what did He behold? "All are gone astray," replies the Prophet, "there is none that doth good, no, not one."* Though the Prophet here speaks particularly of the conduct of men before the coming of our Saviour; yet we must acknowledge, painful though it be, that his words are, in a great measure, applicable to these our times also. For how few are there who seek the Lord in sincerity and truth!—that make heaven the great object of their care! The greatest part of men, now-a-days, look upon the love and service of God as a matter of secondary importance. The chief, the principal, the engrossing object of their thoughts, of their labours, is to make provision for the flesh and its concupiscences, to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of this life. But, with respect to devoting their hearts to God, of spending their lives in His holy service and love, they scarcely take any pains, they hardly make any effort, to effect this. Alas! the time will come in which they will

* Psalm, xiii. 2, 30.

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sadly bewail their folly, when it will be too late.

In order to escape such a fearful misfortune, apply yourself with all diligence, O Christian soul, to the attainment of your last end, and imitate in this the example of the saints, who feared no evil, except that of offending God, and forfeiting His holy love. Thus the chaste Susanna acted, when she was attacked by the two old men, who sought to deprive her of her innocence, and threatened her with an ignominious death if she refused to comply with their wishes. What shall I do, she exclaimed, for I am threatened on every side? Whichever way I act, I cannot escape death; but it is better for me to fall into your hands, without offending God, than to sin in the face of the Lord,* and to perish eternally. So also the generous Eleazar acted when he was solicited to eat of certain meats forbidden by the law. "I might, perhaps," replied the venerable old man, "by this act save myself from death, and prolong my life; but, although, for the present time, I should be relieved from the punishments of man, yet should I not escape the hand of the Almighty, neither

* Daniel, xiii., 22.

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alive nor dead."* Such, in fine, was the conduct of the great vessel of election, the Apostle St. Paul. He represented to himself all which is most afflicting, most terrible, most trying to human nature. He imagined tribulations awaiting him on every side — that he was oppressed with hunger, and distressed with thirst— that he was surrounded with perils, and overwhelmed with persecutions and sufferings—that the whole world was in arms against him—that all the powers of earth and hell were leagued against him; and at the contemplation of all these afflictions he exclaimed, "who shall separate us from the charity of Christ? Shall all those trials? No. I am certain that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall ever be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."†

Here enter seriously into yourself, and resolve, from this day forward, to love the Lord your God, not in words only, but in deed and in truth, that is, as your Saviour says, "with your whole heart,

* Macab. vi., 26. † Romans viii., 38,

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with your whole soul, and with your whole mind." To love God in this manner, you must give Him effectively the first place in your affections and thoughts: you must love Him sovereignly, that is, in preference to all things in heaven and on earth. If God were at this moment to say to you: "you shall be rich and powerful; you shall attain to the highest pitch of human glory in this life; and still more, you shall be exempted from death: but you shall never possess my glory, you shall never see my face, you shall never enter into the kingdom which I have prepared for my elect." If God should make you this offer, what would be your reply? Would you willingly accept of it? If so, remarks St. Augustine, you may know for certain that you do not love God as you ought to do. For, if you really love God with all you heart and soul, you will be ready to part with all that is dearest to you rather than to be separated from Him. You will make Him the chief, the principal object of your thoughts, the centre of your desires, your first beginning and your last end. You will employ your understanding in knowing His infinite majesty, your will in loving His infinite goodness, your life

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and strength in blessing and serving Him alone. Examine, then, the inmost recesses of your heart; see what has been your past conduct; and resolve, from this day forward, to devote yourself entirely to His holy service and love.

What gratitude, what service and love do I not owe Thee, O Lord my God, for having created me for the noble end of loving and serving Thee in time, that I may enjoy Thee for ever in Thy eternal kingdom. Oh! that I had never offended Thee, O most lovely and bountiful Lord! Oh! that I had suffered any other loss but that of Thy holy friendship and love. I most sincerely thank Thy infinite goodness, for having spared me, and for calling me now from the ways of sin, into the path of holiness and justice. By the light of Thy holy grace, I now see clearly all my ingratitude and malice, for which I am most heartily sorry, and implore Thy mercy. If hitherto I have gone astray from Thee, I am resolved to love and serve Thee alone, for the remainder of my life. For this purpose I renounce for ever whatever the world esteems, and love and embrace most willingly whatever can assist me to attain to Thy holy love—for what are all the

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goods and enjoyments of this world when compared with Thy sweet service, with Thy holy love, but vanity, deceit, and dirt? Away, away from me, ye false and seducing pleasures, ye base and treacherous creatures. I am resolved to live and die for God alone. From this moment I take my Creator, my sovereign Lord, for my only good, and for my portion for ever. Yes, I will love and serve Thee faithfully, O my God, during life, that I may love and enjoy Thee eternally in the kingdom of Thy glory. Vouchsafe, O Lord, to confirm my good resolutions, and grant me the grace of loving and seeking Thee alone, now, and for ever. Holy Mary, mother of fair love, look upon me with your merciful eyes, and obtain that my heart may for ever burn with the love of your divine Son.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTAINING TO OUR LAST END.

There is, perhaps, no maxim in the Gospel which is more calculated to pro-

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duce a strong impression on the heart of the Christian than this sublime sentence of our Saviour: "What will it profit a man to gain the whole world if he lose his own soul."* Oh! how many christians, struck by this great truth, abandoned the world for ever, and entered religion, where they lived in holiness and justice all the days of their lives. How many holy martyrs, strengthened and animated by the same maxim, have gone forth with undaunted courage to meet the most cruel death for the sake of Christ. It was by this great maxim that the glorious Saint Ignatius drew so many souls to God, and amongst them the great St. Francis Xavier. "Francis," thus the saint spoke to him on one occasion, "reflect that the world is a traitor, which promises but does not perform; and, though it should fulfil its promises, think you that it would ever be able to make you happy? And even supposing that it could make you happy, how long would this happiness endure? Could it last longer than the few years of your mortal existence?" And when death arrives what would be your lot?" At these words Francis abandoned the world,

* Matt. xvi., 28.

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followed St. Ignatius, and became himself a saint. The same happened to another young man, called Francis Zazera, of whom mention is made in the life of St. Philip Neri: perceiving that this young man was greatly attached to the world, the Saint once spoke to him as follows: "In all probability you will attain to high honours and dignities. In the course of time you will most likely become a Prelate, then a Cardinal, and then, perhaps, even Pope. But, tell me, my friend, what will be your lot after the lapse of a few years? What will be your final doom? Go," continued the saint, "and meditate upon these my last words." The young man returned home, and having pondered long and deeply upon what the man of God had told him, abandoned his worldly pursuits, and entered religion, where ever after he devoted himself with the greatest fervour to the love and service of God. The following considerations tend to impriut deeply in your mind and heart, O christian soul, this most sublime and important truth.

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CONSIDERATION I.

The importance of attaining to our last end, is shown by the great value of our immortal soul.

An affair is considered serious and important—first, according as the matter on which it treats is valuable and precious — secondly, according as the consequences which depend upon its success or failure are weighty. Keeping these two principles before your mind, apply yourself to weigh well the high importance of attaining to your last end, of securing your eternal salvation. What is, in the first place, the thing which constitues the principal object in the great affair of your last end? What is the thing of which it treats? Is it some rich estate, some princely inheritance, some earthly dignity, or worldly grandeur? Is it any of those objects which the world so much values, so highly esteems, so eagerly pursues? Ah! no; it is none of these fading things—but it is something far more valuable, far more precious. far more sublime; it is something of far higher price than all the

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honours and treasures of this world—something infinitely more than all the sceptres and crowns of the whole earth. For where shall we find upon earth an object so precious, so valuable, so sublime, so priceless, as an immortal soul? What are all the riches and dignities of the world, and all the kingdoms and empires of the universe, when compared with the soul of the humblest, the most despised man upon earth? Is not the soul of man stamped with the image of the Divinity, formed to the likeness of God himself, crowned by Him with honour and glory, made only a little lower than the angels, and destined for the possession of an endless and perfect beatitude? Is it not the great masterpiece of Almighty wisdom and infinite power, the worthy object of the complacency and delight of a God of infinite majesty?

That you may understand more clearly the price and value of the human soul, consider what God himself has done to redeem it from the powers of Hell, and to restore it to the state of justice. Oh! what an excess of mercy and goodness do we here behold! to deliver us from the slavery of sin, to enable us to save

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our immortal souls, this omnipotent and infinitely perfect God gave to the world His only-begotten Son as a victim of propitiation. Yes, this all-powerful, independent, self-existent and most holy God set so great a value on the soul of man, as to deliver up to death His own most beloved Son for its redemption. And what has not His beloved Son our divine Redeemer endured for the same end? What has not this innocent Lamb of God done and suffered to blot out the sentence of eternal death which has stood so long against us, and to enable us to save our souls? For this end He took upon himself our human nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, and was born a helpless and suffering babe in the crib of Bethlehem. For this purpose He lived for thirty years in obscurity, poverty, and labour; for this He suffered torments the most cruel, the most painful, the most ignominious; for this at last He gave up His life on a disgraceful cross despised and abandoned by all. Ah! enter in spirit into the garden of Gethsemane and behold what your Divine Redeemer there endured for the sake of your immortal soul. Behold Him prostrate on the ground whilst His most

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precious blood distils in large drops from every pore! Behold Him on Calvary hanging upon the Cross covered with gaping wounds from head to foot, bleeding and dying for your redemption. Oh! see this is the ransom which Jesus the Son of God paid for your immortal soul! Behold at how dear a rate He has purchased your redemption.

But it is not only from what God has done and suffered for its salvation, that you may learn the priceless value of your soul; but you may also discover this from the great and unceasing efforts which your adversary the Devil makes, in order to effect its ruin, and to draw it to eternal perdition. Oh! consider for a moment how your infernal enemy attempts to plunge your soul, that soul redeemed with the blood of Christ, into everlasting ruin. See with what violent and continual temptations, with what cunning deceits, with what untiring and persevering hatred and malice he is ever going about seeking whom he may devour. When our divine Redeemer permitted this implacable enemy of man to tempt Him in the desert, the Devil transported Him, says the Evangelist, to the summit of a lofty

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mountain, and pointed out to Him all the kingdoms of the world, describing their riches, their glories, and their pleasures, and offered to put Him in possession of all these if He would only surrender to Him in return His immortal soul by an act of adoration. "All these," said he, "will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me."* Behold, exclaims St. Bernard commenting on this passage, behold what an immense value your greatest enemy sets upon your soul, since he is ready to give you the whole world in exchange for it. Ah! what a reproach is this to those christians who surrender their souls to this bitter enemy, and make themselves his slaves, not indeed to gain the riches of the world, or the honours of an empire, or to purchase the dignity of a kingdom, but for a vile and momentary gratification, for a mere trifle, for a mess of pottage. Oh! what blindness, what folly, what insensibility, what madness, to esteem that so little, which the Devil himself values so highly!

And yet, how many there are amongst christians, who labour under this fatal blindness, and are guilty of such a detestable folly. Oh! what a confusion for

* Matt. iv. 9.

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me, O Lord, when I reflect that I too have been one of this wretched number! What a shame when I consider that instead of doing honour to my soul according to its deserts, I have defiled it by the most disgraceful deeds, and have trodden it under foot by my sinful conduct. Oh God! how vile and disgraceful has been the course of life which I have led. "*Deflexi abs te.*" I can also say weeping, with St. Augustine, *et factus sum monstrum vitæ.* I acknowledge that I have been a miserable wretch, a vessel of iniquity. Thou hast placed me upon earth that I might serve thee, and instead of this I have exhausted my energy in serving the flesh and the devil. Thou hast created me and showered down upon me Thy choicest blessings, that I might save my soul, and instead of this I have abused Thy gifts, and neglected my eternal salvation. Oh days, months, and years of my life, how ill have I employed you! Would that I might undo all the evil which I have done; I declare that I would spare no labour, I would encounter any suffering, I would make any sacrifice whatsoever, in order to effect it. But since this is not in my power, I am most sincerely sorry, O my dear Jesus, for having offend-

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ed Thee, and am resolved to redeem the time which I have spent in sin, by loving Thee for the future with the greatest fervour of my heart. I promise that I will keep a constant watch upon my soul, and that I will labour earnestly, by good works, to secure my salvation.

CONSIDERATION II.

The importance of attaining to our last end, is shown by the serious consequences which follow, from gaining or losing it.

From the consideration of the immense value of an immortal soul, turn your attention to the serious consequences which will flow from gaining or losing your last end, from attaining or forfeiting your eternal salvation. If in a court of law a cause were pending about some rich estate, some princely inheritance, upon the decision of which depended the fortune or utter ruin of some noble family, how great would be the trembling anxiety of that family and of every one connected with it during the trial! If some unfortunate man were on trial for some enormous crime laid to his charge, on which hung life or death, with what

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breathless suspense and expectation would not all present await the verdict of the jury! when in ancient times it was debated in the Council of Rome, whether the City of Carthage, the great capital of Africa and deadly enemy of Rome, should be destroyed or not, the whole world as it were awaited in anxious expectation the important decision. Now, if the temporal welfare or ruin of a noble family, if the life or death of a criminal, if the preservation or destruction of a rich and powerful city is looked upon as of such serious and weighty interest, what shall we say of the consequences which follow the attainment or loss of our last end? what will be your gain if you should happily succeed in this great affair? what will be your loss if you should unhappily fail to attain it?

To form some faint idea of this, lift up your eyes and behold above you that glorious kingdom destined by God in His boundless mercy and love for your reward if you attain your eternal salvation. Behold that lofty and brilliant throne, that never-fading crown of glory that awaits you, that perfect and eternal happiness, which is ready to reward your

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light and momentary trials endured here for the love and service of God. Yes, if you are so happy as to secure the attainment of your last end, that inconceivable happiness will be your portion for ever. You will be admitted into that glorious kingdom, where there will be neither mourning, nor sorrow, nor affliction, but where you shall reign for ever and ever in the enjoyment of eternal and perfect joy. Oh! what a wonderful, what a ravishing sight will it be to gaze upon the God of infinite majesty, to behold Him face to face, without veil or shadow in all the splendour of His glory, surrounded by countless myriads of enraptured spirits, all burning and glowing with divine love! what a happiness to enjoy this infinite good eternally and for ever!

But what will be your fate if you are so unhappy as to neglect the great affair of your last end, and lose your immortal soul? Cast your eyes down into that profound abyss, that place of unutterable woe, where "no order but everlasting horror inhabiteth," and there see what is the doom of those who neglect to secure their last end. Behold that dreadful prison where there shall be unceasing weep-

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ing and gnashing of teeth; that pool of fire and brimstone, where the reprobate shall be tortured day and night for ever and ever; that place of torments where the worm never dies and the fire is never extinguished; that exterior darkness, that furnace of unquenchable flames where sinners shall drink to the very dregs of the wine of the wrath of God; that abode of despair where nothing is heard but the howlings of merciless devils, and the shrieks and groans of the unhappy victims of the divine vengeance; that woeful dungeon where bitterness, grief, and sorrow, prey continually upon the bleeding heart, and the pangs of unceasing agony tear the wretched soul. Such is the awful fate which awaits those who neglect their salvation, who lose their immortal souls. There is no medium, says a great Saint; we must either rejoice for ever with the blessed, or be tormented for ever with the reprobate. Heaven or hell! salvation or damnation! a crown of glory or a bed of fire! Either to enjoy God in the company of His elect or to hate Him, and to howl in depair with infernal devils!—and all this for ever without hope of change or relief. Oh frightful thought! oh tremendous

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alternative! oh! what affair can be so important as that of our last end upon which such fearful consequences depend? Ah! well might St. Philip declare that he who neglects to secure his salvation ought to be regarded as a madman, as a person who has lost his senses.

Here recollect your thoughts, O christian soul, and endeavour to penetrate deeply into that sentence of our Saviour, "what will it profit a man to gain the whole world if he lose his own soul?" What will it avail you to succeed in all your undertakings, if you fail to attain to your last end? Go down in spirit into those frightful dungeons below, and ask those miserable wretches what has pride profited them or what advantages the possession of riches has brought them. Whilst upon earth, they lived in great splendour and had every pleasure at their command. But alas! the figure of this world soon passed away like a dream, and now they find themselves plunged in a deep abyss of unconceivable and unceasing woe. Behold the unhappy Dives chained down in that bed of devouring fire. Contemplate the strugglings of his convulsed and tortured frame, observe the frightful glare of his

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eyes, only relieved by despair. Listen to his cries of agony, to his shrieks, to his curses, to his fearful blasphemies; plunged in an ocean of fire, the associate of demons, the companion of dragons and scorpions, he begs but begs in vain for one drop of water to cool his burning tongue. Behold there the rich, the powerful, the renowned heroes of the world crushed under the weight of divine vengeance. Hear their loud and bitter lamentations, at their hopeless lot, how they bewail their folly in having deserted the path of justice, and trodden the broad ways of sin. O treacherous riches, they exclaim from the midst of the devouring flames, O seducing pleasures which we so eagerly sought after in life, what do you now avail us? Ah! wo to us who for the sake of a momentary gratification neglected our end, and condemned ourselves to eternal misery. Wo to us, who seduced by the allurements of passion have cast ourselves into these eternal flames! Thus will the reprobate eternally bewail their hopeless misery, and unavailingly regret the loss of their souls. Ah! let their torments and their despair be a warning to you, and excite you to labour with all diligence for the

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attainment of your last end. Oh! remember that you have not here a lasting abode, but that you are to look for one that is to come, one that shall be eternal in Heaven. Never forget that salvation is the only end for which you were made, the one important affair you have to fulfil in this life, the only object which is worthy of your attention. It is an affair not of time but of eternity. The question is not whether you are to be rich or poor, in sickness or in health, in honour or disgrace during twenty, forty, or sixty years of this miserable life; but whether you are to be a friend of God or an object of His severest indignation for ever; yes, Heaven or Hell must be your portion for ever. Between life and death, between salvation and damnation, there is no middle state: you must either be raised to a throne of glory with the angels and saints of God, or cast down into a pit of devouring fire with the devils for all eternity.

Oh! my God what a reproach to me that I have squandered away in offending Thee so many years which Thou hast granted me wherein to love Thee, and secure my eternal salvation. Alas! Thou hast purchased and redeemed my soul by

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Thy most precious blood, and I have defiled it by sin and sold it to its bitterest enemy. Blessed for ever be Thy infinite goodness for bearing patiently with me, and giving me time to repair the evil which I have committed. Have mercy on me, O bountiful Lord, have mercy on me and save my soul. If for the past I have been ungrateful to Thy bounty and forgetful of Thy love, now I am determined to live and die for Thee alone. O God of Love, O Spirit of Charity, vouchsafe to enkindle in my soul Thy heavenly fire. Come, O dear Lord, come and take full possession of my heart. Come and cleanse my soul from every stain of sin; come and destroy by the strength of Thy grace whatever Thou findest there which is displeasing in Thy sight. Oh! may I begin now and persevere until death to love Thee with all my heart and soul! May I never cease to offer to Thee that homage of adoration and praise which is due to Thy infinite majesty. May I never cease to render to Thee that tribute of service and love which is due to Thy infinite goodness—may I persevere in loving and serving Thee until that happy hour arrives in which I shall see and enjoy Thee face to

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face in the Kingdom of Thy glory. O Mary, Queen of heaven and earth, obtain for me the grace of ever burning with the love of Your Son and of securing my eternal salvation.

CONSIDERATION III.

The importance of attaining to our last end is evinced by its being our own individual business.

Consider, O christian soul, that the attainment of eternal salvation is your own individual affair, because salvation is entirely and exclusively your own charge, and absolutely requires your own personal labour and exertion to secure it. When there is question of human affairs it is somewhat excusable if we do not evince great anxiety respecting them, because we can execute them through the instrumentality of others, and our negligence or defect in fulfilling them may be supplied by the labour and diligence of others who are concerned in the business. Thus for instance, a king may govern his kingdom through the instrumentality of his ministers and different officers; and if he happen to be

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careless about the interests of his subjects, his neglect of the duties of his high charge may be remedied by the wisdom and experience, by the zeal and fidelity of those more faithful subjects who attend around his throne. In the same manner, parents may provide for the education of their children by the aid of Masters and Tutors, and their own neglect may be supplied by the care and attention of their relatives. So also, if the husband is careless and negligent in the management of domestic affairs, the wife may compensate for his defect by her diligence and activity. But the case is far otherwise with regard to the attainment of eternal salvation, since this is our own personal affair, our own peculiar business, the success of which depends entirely upon our own individual efforts, so that if we are so foolish and senseless as to neglect it, it is hopeless to expect that any one else can supply our defect; it is in vain to look for any remedy; all is lost for ever. In order to attain eternal salvation it is necessary that we should purify our souls from the stain of sin, that we should subdue our disorderly inclinations, that we should do violence to our corrupt nature, and devote our

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hearts entirely and unreservedly to the love and service of Almighty God. Now let me ask, do not these and similar duties so necessary for securing the salvation of our souls, require our own special efforts, our own personal energy? must they not be performed by ourselves? and in case we should neglect them, is it not useless to hope that others will fulfil them in our place? To be the better convinced of this truth represent to yourself that fearful moment in which the transitory scene of this deceitful world shall vanish from your fading eyes, and you shall be challenged to appear before the fearful tribunal of an All-just and All-powerful Judge. What will your condition be in that tremendous moment? What will be your lot in that awful hour? Will you be able to escape the dreadful trial by substituting some other person who may appear and stand in your place before the eternal Judge? Will it be in your power to commit your cause and defence to some faithful, to some powerful friend? Ah! no, for it is appointed that each one of us must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to render *in person* an account of his stewardship. It is useless to hope that any person

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shall appear and relieve us from the heavy charge; for each one of us shall carry his own burden, and answer for himself in that awful hour. The fearful judgment upon which depends our happiness or misery for endless ages shall be decided between ourselves and Christ alone, and wo to us if at that hour we are found to have deviated from the path of justice and neglected our last end; legions of infernal spirits will indeed confront us, exposing each hidden crime of our past lives and calling for our condemnation, but with all their malice they will not be able to injure us in the least if we are found to have fulfilled our sublime destiny, to have spent our lives in the love and service of God. Countless angels too will stand around the resplendent throne of the Almighty Judge as spectators of that awful trial; but all their burning love and earnest supplications will be insufficient to appease the anger of the eternal Judge, or to prevent him from pronouncing against us the sentence of everlasting death, if, unhappily, we are found to be guilty in his sight.

Another reason which shows that eternal salvation is your own concern is,

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because all the gain or loss which attends the good or bad success of this great affair will be *entirely yours*. In human undertakings it not unfrequently happens that one person endures all the labour, and another enjoys the fruit of his toils: "It is one person," says our blessed Saviour, "who sows and another who reaps."* Thus for instance the gains of a father who by his diligence has realized a large fortune, or the losses of him who by his thoughtlessness or negligence has plunged himself into misery, are shared in a great measure by his children, and sometimes even by strangers. How often does it happen that a person who has accumulated great wealth and raised himself to the highest honours, and another who has dissipated his possessions and brought his affairs to a ruinous state, is on a sudden overtaken by death, and is compelled to leave to others the enjoyment of his past labours, or the suffering arising from his carelessness? But it is not so with regard to the great business of eternal salvation. No, all the good or bad effects, all the good or bad success of this affair will be determined by the

* John iv. 37

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eternal Judge, in favour of or against him who has been the cause of them. Relating to this most important affair, what St. Paul says is strictly true, that "whatever things a man shall sow, them also shall he reap;" that "he who soweth in the flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption and eternal death; but he who soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting."* If we are so happy, so fortunate as to bring this great business of salvation to a prosperous issue, we shall ourselves enjoy all the merit and reward of our good works, of our labours and sufferings; we shall ourselves receive from the hands of our just Judge that crown of justice which He has promised to His faithful servants. But if on the other hand, we are so foolish as to neglect this important business, if we are so miserable as to fail in this great undertaking, the whole ruin will fall upon our own guilty heads, and we alone shall experience the fearful consequences of this our neglect. It is we who will suffer all the horrors of damnation, we shall have to bear the whole weight of the wrath of the angry Judge, and to endure all the pains of eterna.

* Galat. vi. 8.

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perdition. No friend will ever appear to relieve our torments, or to take upon himself a share of our miseries, to moderate or assuage the burning heat of those devouring flames that shall for ever surround and torture us. No, if we are so miserable as to lose our souls, to forfeit our salvation, we ourselves shall be compelled to drink of the cup of divine vengeance even to the very dregs.

The last reason which shows that the affair of eternal salvation is our own affair is, because it does not concern what is merely accidental to us, but it affects our very essence, our personal existence, our very being. Earthly undertakings properly speaking do not affect man himself, but only something belonging to man. Thus for instance the good or bad management of domestic affairs, the success or failure of a lawsuit, the prosperity or adversity in worldly projects and speculations may affect our fortune and reputation, and sometimes even our mortal life, but they can never reach our immortal soul; they can have no direct influence on our destiny beyond the grave. But the case is far otherwise with regard to the business of eternal salvation; for this is an affair which

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concerns the whole man body and soul, and that for an endless eternity. Hence our blessed Redeemer very justly admonishes us not to fear them who have no other power except that of killing our body; but rather to fear Him who after having killed the body has power to cast us into hell both body and soul.*

We read in the second book of Kings that Achitophel being sadly disappointed in his designs against king David, went home, made his accounts, provided his people with every thing necessary, arranged all his domestic concerns, and after this he hanged himself from a beam. *Disposita domo sua suspendio interiit.* What a folly! He provides for others and draws ruin upon himself. He bestows the greatest care upon some trifles, and then he destroys his own life. Who can conceive a greater blindness than this? Ah! would to Heaven that a similar and even a greater folly were not daily seen amongst christians, who, as St. Jerom says, display the greatest anxiety in little things, whilst they treat with the most supine negligence the greatest of all concerns which regards their immortal souls. *In minimis cauti,*

* Matt. x. 28.

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in maximis negligentes. How many struggle day and night in order to gain some temporal advantage. But where are those who struggle for gaining the eternal prize? Where is he, asks St. John Chrysostom, who offers himself to the sword and to the flames in order to attain to the heavenly inheritance?

It is related in history, that a young man belonging to an illustrious family, being deeply penetrated with the importance of attaining his eternal salvation, presented himself to a holy Abbot in the desert, and besought him most earnestly to receive him amongst the members of his community, saying that he felt a most ardent desire of saving his soul. The holy Abbot thinking him to be unfit for the kind of life which was led by the religious under his charge, refused at first to grant his request. The fervent youth, without being discouraged by the refusal, renewed his supplication, which he ended by saying as before, that he felt the warmest desire of saving his soul. The Abbot edified by his fervour, but still firm in his opinion, said to him, "I am exceedingly pleased with your excellent disposition, but I perceive that you are a tender youth,

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brought up in refinement, and accustomed to all kinds of comfort. How can you endure the hardships and austerities of our life?" "Father," replied the pious youth, "I wish to save my soul." "I admire your good desires," repeated the Abbot, "and sincerely wish that you may fulfil them. But what prevents you from attending to your eternal salvation in your father's house? What need is there of taking upon your shoulders the heavy burden which is borne by the religious of this community? The members of this house must labour hard, pray unceasingly, keep silence constantly, watch, fast, and chastise their bodies most severely. How can you bear, let me ask you again, the fatigues, the privations, the austerities of our life?" The excellent youth, with great humility and increased fervour, made the same reply as before, saying, "Father, I wish to save my soul! I wish to save my soul!" The Abbot overcome by the fervour and constancy of the young man, admitted him into his community, where he lived and died in the odour of sanctity. Oh! that all christians were animated by a similar anxiety and zeal for securing their eternal salvation!

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Here I am at Thy feet, my dear Lord, covered with confusion and shame for having so long neglected the salvation of my soul. Wo to me if Thou hadst inflicted upon me the punishment which I have deserved by my sins. Wo to me if Thou hadst cut the thread of my life whilst I was wandering away from Thee in the pursuit of worldly enjoyments. But since Thou hast spared me in Thy mercy, I am resolved to love Thee, and to attend with the greatest care to secure my eternal salvation. Yes, my dear Lord, I wish at any rate to attain to the end of my creation, and am firmly determined, cost what it may, to save my soul. *Volo salvare animam meum.* I will not care for what the world shall say, I will disregard the voice of passion, I will subdue my flesh, I will check my pride, because I am resolved to save my soul. If to effect this I must undergo severe labour, if I must pass by the ordeal of sufferings, if I must be tried by heavy crosses, here I am. Let Thy hand, O Lord, direct me in the path of holiness, and this is enough for me; as for the rest, here I am, ready to suffer and to die. I know that Thou art a most loving father, and this knowledge

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is enough to induce me to submit to whatever Thou shalt appoint. O most holy Mary, through whose means the Saviour of the world clothed himself with our flesh, vouchsafe to plead my cause before His throne, and to obtain for me the grace of saving my soul.

CONSIDERATION IV.

The importance of attaining to our last end, is evinced by its being our only real business.

Consider how the affair of eternal salation is not only your *own individual business*, but also your *only real business.* The reason for this is because you have but one soul to save or lose, and this one soul can be saved or lost only once, and upon this depends your whole happiness or misery for an endless eternity. There might, perhaps, be some excuse for the indifference and carelessness of Christians about their salvation if they had more than one soul, or if it was in their power to repair the loss of this one But oh! how foolish is it to neglect this great business seeing that they have but one soul, and knowing as they do

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that this being once lost all is lost for ever. If by any accident you should lose your property, your station, or some honourable dignity you possess, you may still recover them or may obtain greater advantages in their place. If sickness or disease fall upon you, hope still cheers you with the prospect of recovering your former health. If, unhappily, you are deprived of an eye, a hand, or a foot, great as your affliction is, yet are you consoled at the thought that you have still another eye, another hand, or foot. But if you once fail in the great business of eternity, if you once lose your soul, what can console you? "What exchange," says our Saviour, "shall a man give for his soul?" It is related that a prince once asked, through his ambassador, for a favour from Pope Benedict the XII., which he could not grant without offending God. "Tell your prince," replied the holy Pontiff, "that if I had two souls I might, perhaps, endanger one to please him, but since I have but one, I cannot, I will not risk the loss of that one to please any earthly monarch." St. Teresa often repeated, "one soul, one eternity." *One soul*, if this is lost, all is lost; *one eternity*, if this be once

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lost, it is lost for ever. When once the soul has passed the gates of death, there is no returning, she must enter into the house of eternity without the possibility of ever leaving it. Oh! then where is our faith, where is our reason, where is the love we bear to our own soul that we do so little to secure its salvation? Why do we seek so eagerly after the base gratifications of this earth? Why do we run so ardently after the pleasures and honours of this world, and neglect to secure our only important concern, our eternal welfare? Let us now arise from our sleep of death, and put off this fatal indifference. Little does it matter whether we be rich or poor, learned or ignorant, in good or bad health; or whether our life be long or short, provided we keep close to God and save our souls. If we are so happy as to succeed in this, we will secure to ourselves a glory which will amply repay us for all our sufferings; a glory infinite and eternal, the possession of God Himself, who will be our reward exceedingly great for an endless eternity. Let us, then, fear no difficulty, no labour; let us patiently and cheerfully endure every fatigue and every danger to gain that im-

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mortal crown of glory which our bountiful Lord has prepared for us; let us, as the Scripture says, be ready to agonize for our souls, to fight even unto death to secure our eternal salvation. Oh! consider what will be your regret, your agony and terror at that fatal moment when you shall be stretched on the bed of death, if during life, you prepare not for your journey to eternity. What terror will you not feel when you shall see yourself about to be launched forth so unprepared into an unknown world from whence there will be no return! When your most just and angry God shall demand an account of all your years, and ask for a return for all His labours, His sufferings, and His blood; when you shall see the world which you have so long loved and idolized abandoning you in the hour of your greatest need! What despair will fill your soul when you shall find that your season for gaining Heaven is lost, your beloved pleasures are gone, that all is passed away like a dream, that no time is left you for amendment, and that no hope, no consolation remain to you? Ah! then the great importance of salvation will plainly appear; then you will be fully sensible of the awful truths of

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eternity; then you will clearly see the folly, the emptiness, the meanness of all earthly, of all carnal pleasures. But on the other hand, what consolation, what hope, what confidence will you not feel in that moment, terrible even to the saints, if during your life you prepare for that perilous journey into eternity? if now, if this very day you seek the things which will then be for your peace? If now you strive to live the life of the just? Then the torments of death shall not touch you, but having fought the good fight, having kept the faith and finished your course, you will close your eyes to this wretched world in the sweet hope of soon obtaining that crown of justice which God has prepared for them that love Him.

Behold, O dear Lord, prostrate before Thy infinite Majesty, a miserable sinner who most humbly implores Thy compassion and mercy. I firmly believe that Thou art my sovereign Good, and that every thing else is only vanity. When I consider my great blindness and wickedness in having offended Thee, and neglected my eternal salvation for the sake of the miserable and base enjoyments of this world, I am overwhelmed with

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shame and scarcely dare to raise my eyes towards Thy infinite Majesty. Penetrated with deep sorrow for having offended Thee, I most humbly implore Thy clemency, and beseech Thee not to treat me according to my deserts, but according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies. I acknowledge that of myself I am incapable of doing any good, and cannot even conceive a single good thought; but my hope rests entirely upon the help of Thy powerful grace. Look down, O merciful Lord, upon Thy unworthy servant, and vouchsafe to enkindle in my heart that blessed fire which Thou didst bring from Heaven, and which Thou dost so ardently desire to see enkindled in the hearts of all men. Oh that I might live and die a victim to Thy holy love! Oh! that I might burn unceasingly with this sacred fire, and at length breathe forth my soul into Thy bosom! Oh that I might be admitted into Thy presence to enjoy Thy beatific vision, and to adore and glorify Thee for endless ages. For this purpose I renounce for ever all the pleasures and vanities of the world, and consecrate myself entirely to Thy honour and glory. Assist me, ye angels and saints from your blessed

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abodes to obtain this grace from God, and cry out with one voice: "Have mercy, O Lord, on this wretch, have mercy on him, and save his soul." And Thou, O most holy Virgin Queen of Heaven and earth, refuge of sinners, mother of all who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, Thy Son and my Saviour, do Thou also intercede for me. May I glory henceforth in nothing save in the love and service of my God. May God alone be all my hope, my treasure, and my joy in life, in death, and for all eternity. May Jesus Christ live in me and I in Him, both now and for ever more. Amen.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE MANNER IN WHICH WE OUGHT TO LABOUR TO ATTAIN OUR LAST END.

The salvation of our soul is of all affairs the most important, for upon it depends whether we shall be for ever happy with the saints in Heaven, or miserable with the reprobates in Hell. But, alas! notwithstanding that chris-

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tians acknowledge salvation to be of such paramount importance, how few are there who really labour to secure it, and who make this the great business of their present existence. Oh! what blindness, what folly! we believe that we have not here a lasting abode, that we are but strangers and pilgrims upon this earth, and yet we fix our affections upon the perishable trifles of this world as if we were to remain here for ever. We know that God has prepared for us joys and delights so great, so incomprehensible, that "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the mind of man been ever able to conceive the like," and yet we pursue the vain fleeting joys of this deluding world. We know that the land of promise towards which we are journeying is a land of delight, of peace and of happiness, and yet like the children of Israel we seek for the wretched, the miserable pleasures of Egypt. Ah! let us not any longer be so careless about securing our heavenly inheritance; let us not exchange this our princely birthright for the wretched patrimony of the children of this world; let us not despise that glorious crown which God has prepared for us in His eternal Kingdom; but let

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us now begin to labour in earnest to make sure our calling and election. That we may be the better enabled to effect this, we will consider in this chapter the manner in which we must work out our eternal salvation.

CONSIDERATION I.

We must labour for the attainment of our last end with great diligence and care.

There are some persons who carry their blindness so far as to believe that we are not bound to make any great efforts or to labour earnestly to secure our eternal salvation. They tell us that Almighty God is infinitely good, that He desires the salvation of all men; that Jesus Christ has died for all, and by His precious blood has obtained pardon for our sins; that He has done all that is necessary, and that therefore we need not trouble ourselves about good works in in order to be saved, but ought to rely solely on the infinite merits of Him who suffered and died for our redemp tion. It is perfectly true that God is infinitely good, and that He desires our sanctification, that He does not wish the

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death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted and live. It is true that Jesus Christ has shed His most precious blood for our salvation, that He delivered Himself up a victim for the redemption of the whole world, and that He hung and died upon an ignominious Cross in order to despoil principalities and powers, and to draw all things to Himself. Yet notwithstanding all this, our nature is so corrupted by sin, and so inclined to evil, our will is so blind and perverse, that we must labour earnestly and fight valiantly, if we desire to gain the victory and to save our souls. God, it is true, does not fail to bestow upon us His grace to enable us to work out our salvation, but at the same time it is also true that He requires our co-operation with this His grace, if we wish to be saved. He requires us to gird up our loins and to keep our lamps continally burning in our hands, if we wish to be admitted to the marriage of the Lamb. It is true that by means of divine love, Christ has rendered His yoke sweet, His burden light, yet in consequence of our natural weakness and corruption, it is only with great difficulty that we can bend down our stubborn wills in submission to His holy yoke.

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The doctrine of the Holy Scripture on this point is most decisive and clear. "The kingdom of Heaven," says our divine Redeemer, "suffereth violence, and the violent only bear it away." And in another place He says, "he that will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his Cross daily, and follow Me." And again He says: "Enter ye in at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are that go in thereat." And as if this were not sufficient to convince us of the necessity of labouring earnestly for the attainment of salvation, He adds: "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it." Now I ask, whether to offer continual violence to nature, daily to mortify our disorderly inclinations by carrying our Cross, to walk along the narrow and rugged path that leads to life, is not an arduous and difficult task, and one which requires our best efforts, our constant labour?

The teaching of Christ on this point is expressly confirmed by that of the apostles, whom He sent to preach His Gospel to all nations. St. Peter thus exhorts

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us in his second epistle: "Wherefore, brethren, labour that by good works you may make your calling and election sure." In another place he represents to us our adversary the devil going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and exhorts us to be on our guard, and to repel his attacks by the shield of faith! The Apostle St. Paul describes the fearful struggle which exists between the spirit and the flesh, and urges us in the strongest terms to pray unceasingly, and to fight valiantly against the powers of hell, if we wish to secure our salvation. "Pray," says he, "without ceasing, stand firm, having your loins girt about with truth, having on the breast-plate of justice, in all things take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish the fiery darts of the wicked one, and take unto you the helmet of salvation, by all prayer and supplication, praying at all times." In the same place he represents to us the crown of glory that awaits us beyond the grave, under the figure of a prize which cannot be obtained but by great efforts, and concludes by saying, that he himself feels strictly bound to labour earnestly and chastise most

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severely his rebellious flesh in order to be saved. "Know ye not," says he, "that they that run in the race, all run indeed, but one receiveth the prize? So run that you may obtain; and every one that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself from all things; and they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one. I, therefore, so run not as at an uncertainty; I so fight not as one beating the air, but I chastise my body and bring it into subjection; lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away." Who then, I ask, who attentively considers these and similar passages of Holy Scripture, will dare to say that salvation can be secured without great diligence and care on our part? But let us look at the lives of the Saints, and see what they did and suffered to secure their eternal salvation. Behold the army of virgins who crucified their flesh with its concupiscence, in order to please their heavenly Spouse, and to be admitted to His nuptials. Behold the multitude of holy Confessors, who waged a continual war against their passions, and trampled under feet the world with all its vanities, in order to secure the

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prize, and gain the victory over their infernal enemies. Behold the army of Martyrs who suffered the most cruel torments, and washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, in order to keep their faith to Him and to obtain from Him the crown of justice. Ah! who has ever entered the Kingdom of Heaven without having been first purified by the ordeal of suffering? Who has ever gained the victory, or received the crown of life, without having first fought valiantly the battles of the Lord? Oh! no, it is in vain to hope for salvation, unless we are prepared and resolved to purchase it by great sufferings and labours, for it is only through many tribulations that we can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

I believe, O most bountiful Lord, that as the reward which awaits Thy faithful servants in Heaven is exceedingly great, so great must be the labours also by which they are to attain to it. *Ad magna præmia perveniri non potest nisi per magnos labores.* I most firmly believe this, and I am very sorry that hitherto my life has responded so little to this my belief; for instead of using my best efforts towards advancing in virtue and fulfilling Thy most adorable will, I have

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wasted away my energy in loving vain and sinful things. Have pity on me, O Lord, have pity on me, and give me grace that for the future I may attend with the utmost diligence to the salvation of my soul. Let me ever bear deeply imprinted in the bottom of my heart Thy sublime lesson, that there is but one thing necessary; and let me also enjoy the blessing of living up to this great maxim with the greatest fervour and zeal. I am well aware of the raging war which the flesh wages against the spirit: I know that my spiritual enemies are always on the watch in order to effect my destruction. Grant, therefore, that I may put on the armour of faith, and repel their attacks; grant that I may subdue my flesh, and extinguish the fiery darts of the wicked one.

O Thou who art the Father of mercy and the God of all consolation, look mercifully upon this Thy servant, and by that love which has prompted Thee to send Thy beloved Son into this world for our redemption, grant that I may disentangle myself from all earthly ties, and consecrate myself entirely to Thy service and love. And Thou, O divine Son, who to redeem us from the slavery

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of sin hast vouchsafed to visit us from on high and to clothe Thyself with our mortality, grant that I may die to all visible things, and live to Thee alone. I expect to receive this grace through that immense love which Thou hast borne to me, and by the powerful intercession of blessed Mary.

CONSIDERATION II.

We must labour for the attainment of our end with great humility.

On examining the conduct of God's Providence in reference to man, we find it constantly verified that He humbles the proud and exalts the humble. This merciful dispensation of divine Providence is beautifully exhibited to us in our Blessed Lady's prophecy, where she says, that "the Almighty has put down the mighty from their seat, and has exalted the humble." And our Blessed Lord declares, "that he who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." The way by which God carries into effect this great plan of humbling the proud, and exalting the humble, is that of with-

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drawing His graces from the one, and of bestowing upon the other His choicest blessings, according to those words of St. James: "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

We cannot wish for a stronger proof, in order to perceive how necessary it is to labour to the attainment of our end with a spirit of humility. How can we succeed in this great undertaking, unless we are especially assisted from above? and how shall we be able to obtain the divine assistance, except we walk in the spirit of true humility?

The humility which is necessary in order to labour successfully for the attainment of our end, consists, first, in the interior sentiment of our own nothingness, so as to feel that of ourselves we are utterly incapable to take the least step, to perform the smallest action, to conceive the slightest thought, which may aid us in gaining eternal life. This, our incapability of doing any thing towards advancing in virtue, and deserving eternal glory, is one of the fundamental truths of Christianity; for as the Apostle St. Paul says: "We are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves

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as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God:" and in another place He says: "If any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceives himself."

Secondly: we should foster a deep sentiment of our own sinfulness, so as to feel that of ourselves not only we are incapable of doing the least good towards gaining eternal life, but are also capable of doing any evil, and of committing every kind of sin. And this is to be understood not only of the greatest sinners, who spend their life in the total forgetfulness of God, and in the indulgence of their wicked passions, but of all men without excepting those who have had the blessing of living in innocence and practising all Christian virtues. For as long as we live in this corruptible body, however far we may have advanced in virtue, we always carry about us a great weight which presses us down to the earth, and exposes us to the danger of losing the grace of God, and of forfeiting our title to His eternal kingdom. The examples of Solomon, of David, of Judas, who after having been favoured by God with the choicest graces, after having enjoyed his especial friendship, fell shamefully into the most heinous

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sins, should be a warning to us, lest we should take pride in ourselves, or rashly confide in our own strength. "Let him that stands fast," says St. Peter, "take heed lest he fall." There is no place or position so holy in which we may cease to fear. Angels sinned in Heaven. Adam in the earthly Paradise, and shall we think ourselves secure? If we consult the lives of the greatest saints, we find that they continued to tremble for their salvation, as long as they lived in the flesh. The great St. Paul, that vessel of election, so full of the love of God, so inflamed with zeal for the salvation of souls, the Apostle of the Gentiles, who laboured more than all the other Apostles for the glory of his divine Master, and for the good of his Church; that illustrious saint, who had been elevated to the third Heavens, where he saw such things as are not given to man to speak; this great favourite of God continually feared for his salvation. "Though," said he, "I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet am I not thereby justified?" And in another place he exhorts all the faithful to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. These were the feelings of the saints of God;

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and shall we be so senseless, so vain, so blind, so presumptuous, as to think ourselves secure, and imagine we have nothing to fear? We who have done and suffered so little to obtain that g orious crown, but who on the contrary have so often provoked the vengeance of God by our sins? We who have deserved long since to burn in the flames of hell? Ah! whoever you are, how holy and perfect soever you may be, fear the Lord, tremble for fear of losing your immortal soul; persevere in this fear and trembling, and your salvation is secure, for as the wise man says: "There is salvation for them that fear the Lord:" fear to offend your God; and this holy fear will give you new strength against your enemies: persevere in this holy fear all the days of your life, and you will have hope and confidence in the last.

Thirdly: We must entertain a deep sentiment of our own unworthiness, so as to feel that we are utterly undeserving of the divine graces, and that all the blessings which we receive from God are the pure effect of His boundless mercy and goodness towards us, without any merit on our part. And this feeling must be common to sinners as well as to the just, for

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all must acknowledge that human nature has nothing in itself by which it may claim any supernatural blessing.

Fourthly and lastly: we must cherish a sentiment of justice, by which we attribute to God all the merit and glory of our good actions, being mindful that "every best gift, and every perfect gift, comes down from above, from the Father of light," and that however exact we may be in the performance of our duties, we have always good reason to say after all in the words of Christ: "We are but poor and unprofitable servants." We ought to imitate on t' is point the four-and-twenty ancients, of whom mention is made in the Apocalypse, who, prostrate before the throne of the Lamb, and casting down their crowns at His feet, cry out saying: "The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and glory, and honour, and benediction."

This sentiment of self-humiliation, beneath the Almighty hand of God, acknowledging Him for the author of every good, and giving Him praise for all the blessings which we may possess, shines most conspicuously in the lives of the saints. Behold the great lawgiver Moses, the

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favourite of God, whom He had chosen amongst thousands to the charge of delivering His people from the slavery of Pharaoh; behold him raising his mind and heart to God, and praising Him for all He had done and suffered in the holy undertaking. "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory." Behold the great Apostle of the Gentiles, who, after enduring the hardest labours, and suffering the heaviest crosses for the sake of Christ; after preaching the Gospel with the most ardent zeal, and converting innumerable souls to the faith of Jesus Christ, gives to God alone all the praise and glory for this, saying: "By the grace of God, I am what I am—To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever." These are the sentiments which ought to animate all such Christians as sincerely wish to labour successfully for the attainment of their end. Impressed with these humble feelings, let them set themselves to work with perfect assurance that the God of all holiness, whose eyes are always directed upon simple and humble souls, will not fail to pour down upon them His choicest blessings. Behold me

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prostrate at Thy feet, O most sweet and bountiful Lord, giving Thee thanks for all Thy mercies, and humbly petitioning for new graces. O Thou, who art the giver of every perfect gift, give me a true spirit of humility, that I may labour successfully in the great work of my eternal salvation. I acknowledge that of myself I have nothing, I deserve nothing, I can do nothing which may enable me to save my soul. I confess that of myself I am a poor, wretched, miserable creature, worthy of being despised by all, and incapable of any good: yet, trusting in the strength of Thy infinite mercy, and on the power of Thy grace, I sincerely hope that I shall be able to overcome all obstacles, and to effect the work of my salvation. Cast upon me, O Lord, Thy merciful eyes, and grant me the grace of walking in the spirit of humility all the days of my life, that I may work out my eternal salvation, and obtain at last that celestial crown which Thou hast promised to Thy faithful servants. O holy Mary, my sweet Mother, make me share in that profound humility, by which the Son of God was induced to take human flesh in thy sacred womb.

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CONSIDERATION III.

We must labour for the attainment of our last end with great confidence in God.

A complete diffidence in ourselves, and an entire confidence in God, are the two fundamental maxims, which, according to the doctrine of the saints, form the basis of all sanctity. The author of the Spiritual Combat lays so much stress upon these two maxims, that his whole book, which is so highly renowned for its supernatural wisdom, rests entirely upon them.

As we have already treated of the diffidence in ourselves, in the preceding consideration, we will now proceed to the other point, which regards confidence in God, and consider how much it is necessary, in order that we may apply ourselves with good success to the great work of our eternal salvation. On reading the Holy Scriptures, we find that confidence in God is highly commended as a most useful thing for drawing down upon us the divine blessings. For a proof of this, it is enough to say that the

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Holy Scripture attributes especially to this confidence, the tender care which the heavenly Father takes of his beloved children. "Cast thy care upon the Lord," says holy David, "and He shall sustain thee." And in another place he exhibits our blessed Lord speaking thus: "Because he hoped in me, I will deliver him. He shall cry to me, and I will hear him; I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him, and I will glorify him."

The merit and value of this holy confidence is exhibited to us in a still stronger manner in the New Testament, where the cures and other blessings which the Redeemer of the world conferred upon those who resorted to Him for aid in their distresses, are especially attributed to the confidence by which they were animated. Thus, in the case of the woman who was cured from the issue of blood, our blessed Saviour praised her faith, and ascribed to it the blessing she had received, saying: "Be of good heart, daughter; thy faith has made thee whole." The same thing He said to the Cananean woman, who approached Him, animated by the most lively confidence, which neither the reproach of the

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Apostles, nor the apparent contempt on the part of Christ could shake. Overcome by so much virtue, our blessed Lord spoke to her thus: "O woman, great is thy faith, be it done to thee as thou wilt!" The same happened in the case of the Centurion, who was highly praised by Christ for his humble confidence in Him, and obtained from Him the cure of his servant. And besides these and other similar facts, which speak so highly in favour of confidence in God, there are some very remarkable declarations, by which our blessed Saviour teaches, that confidence in Him is one of the principal instruments for obtaining His divine graces. Thus speaking once to His disciples, He laid so much stress on the confidence in Him, as to make the fruit of their prayer depend upon it. "All things whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you." Mark xi. 24.

Since confidence in God possesses such a powerful efficacy in drawing down upon us the divine blessings, we ought to cultivate it with every possible care, if we wish to labour successfully in the

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great work of our eternal salvation. One thing which will greatly help us to attain this confidence, is the consideration of the infinite mercy and goodness of God. For though Almighty God is infinitely perfect in all His attributes, yet we are assured by the doctrine of truth, that in the conduct of His Providence towards mankind, He displays His infinite bounty above everything else. "His mercies," says holy king David, "are above all His works." "The mercy of God," says our Blessed Lady, in her sublime canticle, "is from generation to generation to them that fear Him;" and the prophet Isaias, in order to describe in the liveliest colours this same mercy of our heavenly Father in our behalf, represents to us a most tender and loving mother, full of love for her darling child, and concludes by saying, that the goodness and love of God for us, is still greater. "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee in my hands."

If we consider well all the great works of divine omnipotence, in reference to man, from the creation of the world to

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the present time, we find that all is the effect of His bounty, and displays His infinite goodness. It was His goodness which prompted Him to call into existence the universe, and to bestow upon man a rational and immortal soul. It was His goodness which led Him to send into this world His only-begotten Son, for the redemption of mankind. It was His goodness which moved Him to establish amongst men the kingdom of His church, to send down His Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, which still dwells, and will for ever dwell with their successors until the end of time. Hence the Church, acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit, invites all her children to set the greatest possible confidence in God, declaring that of His mercies there is no number, and of His goodness the treasure is infinite. What greater inducement can we desire, in order to apply ourselves to work out our salvation with a heart full of confidence in our most bountiful and merciful Lord!

And here let us remember, that nothing should ever shake or diminish our confidence in God. We ought not to admit of any diminution of confidence by reason of our natural weakness, because

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what is impossible to us by nature, becomes not only possible, but easy and sweet by divine grace, which God is ready to bestow upon all who ask for it. Neither should we allow ourselves to suffer any diminution of confidence at sight of the many sins we may have committed during life, because God in His mercy often makes His holy grace superabound where sin has abounded. We ought also to beware, lest we should lose our confidence by reason of our temptations, however grievous and troublesome they may be, because "God is faithful," as the Apostle St. Paul says, "who will not suffer us to be tempted above our strength; but He will make also with temptation issue that we may be able to bear it." In short, whatever may be the state of our conscience, whether we are saints or sinners, whether we are in consolation or desolation, let us take care to cherish at all times an unlimited confidence in Him, through whose help we can do all things. "Place thy confidence in God," says the holy king David, "and perform goodness."

I bless Thee, O Lord, my God, and I give Thee thanks for having spared me

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so long, and afforded me so many opportunities of loving Thee and saving my soul. The many blessings which Thou hast bestowed upon me until now, call forth my warmest gratitude, and induce me to hope and ask still more from Thy infinite mercy. O Thou, whose very nature is goodness, vouchsafe to exert Thy bounty in my behalf, by purifying my heart from every stain, and filling it up with Thy graces. I am well aware that of myself I can do nothing worthy of eternal life: I know that I am but dust and ashes: I know that my senses are prone to evil from my very childhood. Yet, I also know, that strengthened by Thy holy grace I am able to rise superior to myself, and partake in some manner of Thy omnipotence. However great therefore my weakness may be, however violent may be the attacks of the enemies of my soul, I will never cease to hope in Thee, and I am sure that I shall never be confounded. Although I have no merit in myself for which I may expect any favour from Thee, yet resting on Thy mercy, and on the merits of Thy passion and death, I hope to have a share in Thy choicest blessings. *Vulnera tua.* I will tell Thee in the words of one of

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Thy holy servants, *merita mea*; Thy wounds are my merits.

O most sweet and affectionate Mary, look down with your merciful eyes upon this your unworthy son, and obtain for him the grace of setting his whole heart and soul upon your Divine Son, Jesus.

CONSIDERATION IV.

We must labour for the attainment of our end with generosity.

Experience teaches us that no great undertaking is ever crowned with a prosperous success, unless the persons who are engaged in it display great generosity. Thus for instance, it would be a folly for the commander of an army to expect to defeat his powerful enemies, and to gain a complete victory over them, unless both himself and the soldiers under his charge, display great energy and brave with courage the dangers of war. But if human undertakings, when they are of great importance, cannot be effected without some magnanimity on the part of those who are engaged in them, what shall we say of the generosity which is requisite in order to carry into

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execution the greatest of all affairs, the highest of all undertakings, which is the sanctification of our souls? What are all human enterprises, when compared to that of saving our immortal souls? What are they but trifles and childish concerns? It is for this reason that the Holy Ghost exhorts us in Holy Scripture to undergo every hardship, and to make every possible sacrifice, in order to execute it well, saying, that "We must agonize for our own souls."

There are two very forcible reasons which show the strict necessity of applying ourselves with magnanimity to the work of our salvation, if we wish that our efforts should be crowned with a happy issue. The first arises from the grievous and most fearfnl struggle which the subjugation of our passions, and the pursuit of pure justice must necessarily occasion in our corrupt nature. If man were now such as he came at first from the hands of his Maker, it would be a very easy matter for him to walk in the path of virtue, and to attain his end. For in the state of original justice, his inferior appetites not only opposed no obstacle to the acquisition of holiness, but being entirely subordinate to the

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rational will, sanctified by divine grace, they were rather of assistance to him for the attainment of his end. But alas! for this happy condition was destroyed by sin, and now the inferior faculties of man instead of helping him to raise his heart to Heaven, strive by their allurements to weigh him down to earth. To be fully convinced of this, we need only sound the bottom of our hearts, and examine a little the wretched condition of our rebellious nature. Where is the man who does not feel within himself that fearful strife between the spirit and the flesh which is so clearly described by the Apostle St. Paul? Where is the man who has gained so complete a victory over himself, as not to experience a law in his members which is against the law of his mind, and which strives to captivate him under the slavery of sin? It is well known that even the greatest saints have endured the most awful struggle on this point; some for a few years, and others during all their lives. We know that in the case of the Apostle St. Paul, this struggle was so violent and fearful as to make him tired of life, and wishful for death. Whatever our self-ove may suggest to the contrary, it

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is a fact that we are clothed with a body of sin; that we are prone to evil from our youth, and that our natural inclinations, instead of helping us to raise our hearts to God, are constantly striving to enslave us to the earth and its vanities.

The violence of our passions, and our disorderly inclination to evil, show most plainly that we shall never be able to attain our last end, much less to acquire perfection, unless we set ourselves generously to work. For how shall we be able otherwise, to subdue such fierce and powerful enemies as wage constant war against us? How shall we be able to carry on for months and years the fearful struggle against flesh and blood, to subject our corrupt nature to a state of continual crucifixion, unless we apply ourselves to the work with a willing and generous heart? It is a principle acknowledged by all, that the more powerful and obstinate our enemies, the more we must labour hard to overcome them. But have we not to fight against foes of the worst description? Are they not most obstinate and furious in their attacks? What would then become of us if we were to fail to keep

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constantly on our guard with sword in hand to defend ourselves from their assaults? What would be our lot, if instead of working strenuously, and exerting ourselves to the best of our power to overcome them, we were to indulge in a slothful and easy life?

Another reason, which shows the absolute necessity of labouring with generosity in the great work of our eternal salvation, arises from the many trials and crosses which beset the way of holiness. Look to our blessed Lord, covered with wounds from head to foot, nailed to an infamous cross, expiring in the midst of the most excruciating torments, and learn from him the true and real way to Heaven. Jesus Christ crucified, is the great model of the elect; for all those whom the eternal Father foresaw, them also He has predestinated, that they might be made conformable to the image of this His divine Son. We know not what particular crosses and sufferings may befal us in this life; but we are sure that if we wish to live piously in the Lord, and to save our souls, we must be tried in some way, and that we shall have to endure many heavy crosses. For the true lovers of God are not form-

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ed on Mount Horeb in the midst of spiritual delights, but on Mount Calvary at the foot of their crucified Lord. As it behoved Christ to suffer previous to His entering into His glory, so it is decreed that we should pass through many tribulations previous to our entering into the kingdom of Heaven. Whoever, therefore, truly wishes to secure the attainment of his last end, and to share with Christ in His glory, he must first partake of his sufferings, and drink of the chalice of His passion. But how shall we be able to effect this unless we possess a fervent and generous heart? How can we endure to lead a life of privation, of suffering, of sacrifice, unless we apply ourselves to the work of our sanctification with great energy of soul? How shall we be able to follow our Saviour in the royal way of the cross, and to accompany him to the mount of sorrows, unless we are animated by the same spirit of generosity which prompted Him to deliver Himself up for our sake on Calvary?

Oh, yes, my dear Jesus! I own that the work of my salvation well deserves all my energies, and requires a generous sacrifice. I own, that in order to attain to

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my sublime destination, I must labour hard, and offer continual violence to myself. Vouchsafe, O Lord, to subdue my slothfulness, and to strengthen my weakness, that I may fulfil the blessed design of Thy merciful Providence over Thy unworthy servant. Never permit me to abandon the field, or to relent in my efforts against my enemies. Let me constantly pray and watch, that I may overcome all temptations. Inspire me with a holy courage, inflame me with Thy holy love which is superior to every obstacle, which is as strong as death. Grant that I may exclaim with Thy Apostle: "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword?" No: I am sure that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Mary, Virgin most powerful, obtain for me the grace of serving and loving your divine Son, with a generous heart.

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CONSIDERATION V.

We must labour for the attainment of our last end with perseverance.

Consider, O Christian soul, how necessary it is that we should labour for the attainment of our last end unceasingly. The reason is, because to secure the good success of this great business, it is not sufficient to devote to it some days, weeks, months, or even years; but it is absolutely necessary that we devote to it our whole life; that we be always on the watch, that we fight continually against our enemies under the standard of our great captain Jesus Christ, until death shall put an end to the struggle, and admit us into the kingdom of our Lord. "No one," says St. Paul, "shall be crowned, unless he strive manfully." "To him who begins the good fight," says St. Gregory, "the crown is promised, but it is bestowed only on those who persevere in the combat, until their last breath." "He that shall persevere to the end," says our Blessed Lord, "he

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shall be saved." Whoever, therefore, wishes to secure his eternal salvation, must take it seriously to heart; must labour at all times with a holy dread of his own weakness and inconstancy; and must strive to render his whole life a continual holocaust to the divine Majesty. He must be ready to use violence to himself; to crucify the old man, as the Scripture says, to be in an agony for his soul, to part with all things, though as dear to him as a hand, or a foot, or an eye, rather than endanger his immortal soul. He must use this world as though he used it not; he must pass through this vale of tears as a pilgrim journeying towards his native land. The poor pilgrim as he returns to his home, bears patiently and cheerfully all the labours and fatigues of his lengthened journey, knowing that at each moment he draws nearer to his beloved country, where he will enjoy undisturbed repose and happiness. So in like manner, we who have not here a lasting abode, but are every moment drawing nearer to one that shall be eternal in heaven, should bear with ready and patient submission the various trials and crosses that beset our path through this life, remembering that we

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are very soon to enter into a region of peace and joy. And as the poor traveller loves to speak to all he meets in the way of his home and his native country, aud to think of his Father's house, so ought we poor exiles in this foreign land to love to think and speak of our heavenly country, where alone we shall find true peace and uninterrupted happiness. And in fine, as the wearied pilgrim who has so long groaned in captivity far from his dear native home, is more and more delighted and joyful the nearer he approaches the end of his journey; so ought we to exult with a holy joy when we see this wall of flesh which separates us from our God, falling to pieces; and when we find ourselves on the point of being released from the prison of the body, and admitted into the joys of our Lord: and with a holy impatience we should exclaim with the Apostle, "Miserable man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death, for I long to be dissolved, and to be with Christ;" or with St. Augustine we ought to cry out, "O Lord! let me die, that I may behold Thy face, and be happy for ever in the contemplation of Thy glory;" or with holy David we should continually

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sigh after our true home, saying: "As the wearied hart pants after the fountains of living waters, so does my soul sigh after Thee, my God and my all." Yes, when alarmed or discouraged by the length and difficulties of the way, let us animate our drooping courage by the consideration of that crown of glory which awaits us above; that happiness prepared for us in heaven, our true country, compared with which all the sufferings and afflictions of this life, as St. Paul says, are as nothing. When a mariner is in danger of shipwreck, and of being given up to the mercy of the raging waves, does he not try to the utmost of his power to gain the nearest coast, to reach some place of safety? Does he spare any efforts to escape from his perilous position, to save himself from a watery grave? Does he lose courage at the thought of the hard labour he must endure, and the efforts he must make to save his life? Oh, no! life is dear to him, he struggles, he labours with all his strength, he exerts all his power to free himself from danger; he pauses not, he rests not until he has overcome the violence of the foaming billows, until he finds himself in a place of safety.

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Behold, we are now cast upon the raging ocean of this mortal life, in continual danger of perishing amidst the waves of temptation that foam around us, and bear us on towards the gulf of endless perdition. Who, then, will be so blind and so cruel towards his own soul as not to exert himself to the utmost of his power, until he shall have gained the victory, and reached the port of salvation?

Enter into yourself and consider what you have as yet done to secure salvation? What are the labours, the privations, the sufferings you have endured for this end? What are the mortifications, the sacrifices you have performed to secure your eternal welfare? What are your victories over temptation, your triumphs over the rebellions of the flesh? What is your purity of heart, your humility, your charity, your hunger and thirst after justice, your devotion, your piety, your love of God? Ah! my God, how little indeed have I done to save my soul, to secure my salvation! Oh forgive the past, and assist me by Thy grace, that at length I may begin in good earnest. O Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me! Do Thou, who art the

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light of the blind, enlighten my blindness, stretch out Thy hand to me, that I may come to Thee, and in Thy light behold the light. Let Thy resplendent brightness shine upon us who are blind and tottering in darkness, and in the shades of death. Do Thou, who didst in the beginning say, "Let there be light, and there was light," say also to me, "Let there be light," and then I shall behold the vanity of all earthly things, and see that Thou alone art worthy of all my love. Do Thou direct my feet into the way of peace, protect and deliver me as I wander amidst the numberless snares and illusions which my enemies spread around this my mortal pilgrimage. Yes, do Thou, O Lord my God, strong and powerful, my hope and my salvation, do Thou arise and bid Thine enemies be dispersed, and let those who hate Thee flee from before Thy face. Do Thou guide my frail bark as it labours amidst the billows of this dangerous ocean; let Thy arm guide the helm lest I be overwhelmed by the rushing waters, and with the rudder of Thy holy cross direct my course in safety to the haven of eternal life.

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PART II.

CONTAINING A SHORT MANUAL OF INSTRUCTIONS AND DEVOTIONS.

CHAPTER I.

ON PRAYER.

SECTION I.

The necessity of Prayer.

A man without prayer is like a plant without water, which soon dries up; like a house without foundation, which cannot stand; like a city without walls, which cannot offer resistance to the enemy; like a soldier without arms, who is unable to fight; like a fish taken out of the water, which pants and dies; in fine, like a body without a soul, which is deprived of life. How shall he be able to resist the impulse of the passions, the allurements of the flesh, and the assaults of the devil, who is not supported by the powerful aid of

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Heaven? How can he expect to be strengthened by this supernal aid, unless he asks for it in prayer? "*Nullum credimus*," says St. Augustine, "*nisi orantem auxilium promereri.*" Except the first grace of vocation to the faith, God does not ordinarily grant His gifts to any who do not ask them of Him. "Ask," says Jesus Christ, "and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you;" "Therefore," adds St. Theresa, "he who does not ask does not receive; he who does not seek finds not; he who does not knock shall not behold the door opened to him." "The man who neglects prayer," continues the saint, "is like a paralytic, who has hands and feet, but cannot make use of them."

Now what shall we say of those unhappy Christians, who are always seeking pretexts to excuse their negligence of prayer? Dare they allege any reason for this neglect? Is it not their first duty to attend to the service of God in this life, in order that they may attain to the enjoyment of Him in heaven? and should they not make use of all things on earth as a means to attain this one great end? How, then, can they commit the

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fearful mistake of preferring the means to the end, the body to the soul, the earth to heaven, the creature to the Creator, the dust of this world to the delights of paradise? Can our temporal affairs be more important than those of eternity? Can earthly riches weigh in the scale against the wealth of heaven? Alas! if to preserve for a few years our health and life, we use great diligence, endure great inconveniences, and expend so much labour as we do, why do we neglect prayer, which is the indispensible means of obtaining eternal life? Ah! if, indeed, the Lord required of us to spend every day many hours in this exercise, we might, perhaps, find some excuse, but no; He is satisfied with our devoting to it only a portion of that time which we frequently spend in idleness, and sometimes even in sin; He is satisfied if, from time to time, we raise our thoughts to Him amidst our occupations, or dart towards Him a few tender glances, calling on Him from the depths of our heart; He is content that we take care to invoke Him in our temptations; He is content if we cherish in our hearts a sincere desire to glorify him in all our actions. Can it be that our occupations

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prevent such prayers as these? They do not prevent our often holding converse with men, and shall they prevent our sometimes speaking to God? They do not hinder our minds from dwelling on useless matters, and shall they hinder us from reflecting a little upon the soul, upon God, upon eternity? They do not interfere with our talking over vain amusements, and shall they altogether shut out all sweet converse with our Lord?

Love prayer, then, O Christian soul, and apply yourself with all diligence to this holy exercise, for this is the will of God regarding you. "Pray at all times, and besiege the throne of God with your continual supplications." (Ephes. c. 5.) "Let nothing hinder you from praying always, and be not afraid to be justified even unto death." (Ecc. xviii. 22.) Remember the words of St. Theresa, "That no one ever attained to a high degree of perfection, unless by a long continued practice of prayer." The Emperor, Charles the Fifth, spent every day more than an hour in prayer, even when he was overwhelmed with business. St. Francis Borgia employed every day several hours in prayer, even whilst he was in the

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world, and frequently interrupted the pleasures of the chace that he might retire to pray. St. Francis Regis, one day hearing his mother, when he was five years old, speak of the eternal maxims, exclaimed, "Oh, heaven!" and melting into tears, he began from that time to fear the judgments of God, and to give himself to prayer. St. Aloysius Gonzaga, when quite a boy, betook himself to a life of prayer, and was frequently seen weeping and sighing before the crucifix, with his arms extended, or his hands crossed on his breast.

SECTION II.

On the object of Prayer.

"My dear son," said the holy Tobias to his beloved son, "bless God at all times, and desire of Him to direct thy ways, and that all thy counsels may abide in Him." (Tobias, iv. 20.)

And so also do I say to you, Christian soul: in all your prayers to God ask, above all other things, His grace, His love, and His kingdom, and all besides will be granted to you according to your necessities. Solomon did not demand a long life,

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nor riches, nor the defeat of his enemies, but he asked only for wisdom; but the Lord vouchsafed to grant him, together with wisdom, life, and wealth, and reputation, and continual peace; and thus He rendered him superior in glory and in greatness to any of his predecessors. And so it will be with you, if you are careful to ask of God His love and His friendship; for besides these you will receive from Him every good thing which you need, that may be conducive to your spiritual good. *Inquirentes Dominum non minuentur omni bono.* The prophet David was so deeply impressed with this truth, that he asked but one thing of the Lord, and asked for it earnestly and continually, and this was, that he might dwell for ever in the house of the Lord, and attain to His heavenly kingdom. *Unam petii a Domino, hanc requiram. ut inhabitem in domo Domini.*

These, then, O Christian soul, should be the ordinary objects of your prayers; the pardon of sin, the victory over temptations, the hatred of vice, the love of virtue, the salvation of your soul. "Be very careful," says St. Theresa, "to pray often to God to make known to you your own misery, for this knowledge is of the

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greatest importance to enable us to walk in the way of perfection." St. Francis Borgia by often considering his own nothingness and weakness, held so mean an opinion of himself, that he wondered how all men did not ill-use him. Of St. Francis, St. Bonaventure relates, that he spent days and nights in simply repeating this short prayer: "My God and my all, what art Thou, and what am I?" We must also take care to ask of the Lord the grace to conform, in all things, to His will, *because in this consists the greatest perfection which we can possibly acquire in the spiritual path.* Above all things we should frequently call upon the Lord for perseverance in His grace, and eternal salvation. Final perseverance, which, say the Fathers, is an especial grace, by which the Lord crowns all His other graces, is ordinarily conferred only on those who often ask for it in sincerity of heart.

We should also be mindful to practise ourselves, during prayer, in frequent acts of the love of God. O, what power have these acts to detach our hearts from the vanities of this miserable world, and attach us to our only true and sovereign good! Consider yourself happy when, in

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the evening, you find that you have made many such acts in the course of the day, for they will acquire for you a great accumulation of merits in paradise. When, from any just motive, you call upon the Lord for any temporal benefit, ask it, filled with resignation to His holy will, ready to be deprived of it whenever He judges it expedient for your spiritual good.

SECTION III.

Constancy and Humility in Prayer.

To him who has a lively faith it is a most wonderful thing to see how the Sovereign Master of the universe, the King of glory, is pleased, nay, more, how much He desires that such vile creatures as we are, should address ourselves to Him, should implore His help, as often as we desire to do so. Who can describe the entreaties which are necessary to obtain an audience of the Grandees of earth? But it is not so with our most loving Lord, to whom we may speak at every moment, and present our supplications in every place. Since our bountiful Lord is always ready to hear your supplications, take care, O Christian soul, to

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approach Him often, and to ask of Him to make you entirely His own.

Do not abandon prayer if you are not instantly heard, but be more earnest, and renew your petition with greater fervour, for, says St. Gregory, "the Lord desires to be entreated, and would sometimes be subdued by our importunity." *Vult Deus rogari, vult cogi, vult quadam importunitate vinci.* God sees that by praying we render Him a great worship of faith, of love, of humility, of obedience; for the desire which He feels that we should advance in these virtues, He sometimes defers to grant our prayers, though always ready to pour upon us, in His good time, His most ample benedictions. Behold the blind man of the Gospel, who, with a loud voice, cries to Jesus for mercy; what attention pays he to the words of those who would reduce him to silence? Does he obey their desires? Ah, no! he cries still louder, "Jesus Christ, Son of David, have mercy on me." So should every sinner cry to Jesus, if he really wishes to be heard by Him. If the Lord does not answer to his first request, he should repeat his prayer more earnestly, prostrate himself in His presence with greater fervour, knowing that though

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He may delay to grant His petition, He never refuses it at last. What did not the paralytic mentioned in the Gospel suffer in the hopes of obtaining a cure? Did he not wait thirty-eight years without losing courage, or despairing that he should at length receive the blessing after which he so pined? And shall we be so weak of heart and mind as to lose our confidence, and leave off praying because we are not instantly heard? St. Mary of Egypt, when she found herself near her death, confessed to the holy Abbot Zosimus, that after her conversion she had for eighteen years, suffered dreadful and continual temptations, but that by means of prayer, she had at length obtained a complete victory. The same happened to St. Augustine, to St. Margaret of Cortona, and to many other holy penitents, who are now venerated upon our altars as so many mirrors of perfection. We must not be disturbed by the distractions which occur to us in our prayers, against our will, because they, instead of hurting us, are rather subjects of merit to us for heaven. The saints teach that the acts which we make to drive away distractions, in order to please God in our prayers, are so many acts of virtue and

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love, and that the most fruitful prayers are not those which we make with the greatest recollection and pleasure, but those which we make with the greatest love of God.

Be not alarmed at the aridity by which you may be troubled, because in prayer we should rather seek the God of consolation, than the consolations of God. The prayer which Jesus Christ made in the garden was full of weariness, of sadness, of mental agony, but yet it was a most devout and meritorious prayer, because it was made with heroic resignation to the will of the eternal Father. St. Francis of Sales teaches, that whoever desires to make a fruitful prayer, ought to abandon himself entirely into the arms of God, without concerning himself either about consolations or desolations. Pray with humility if you desire that God should listen to you, for God rejects the prayer of the proud and hears that of the humble. It is said in Ecclesiasticus, that the prayer of the humble soul penetrates heaven, and reaches to the throne of God, and never departs from it till it is granted. "*Prayer should be accompanied with great reverence, considering that we stand in the presence of God,*

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and speak to the Sovereign Lord, before whom the heavenly virtues tremble with respect and fear," says Mary Magdalene of Pazzi. It is related by Gerson, that a great servant of God used to say, "For myself I have found that the best way to make a good prayer, is to present myself before God as a child before his father, as a beggar before a rich man, as a sick man before a physician, as a blind man or a deserted orphan before his benefactor." We ought, then, in our prayers, to keep always two objects before our eyes, one eye should be upon our own misery, and at this sight we should humble ourselves profoundly; the other upon God and His mercy, and this sight should dilate our hearts, and arouse a lively confidence in His goodness. It was thus the prophet Daniel prayed when he said, "*Incline, O my God, Thine ear and hear; open Thine eyes and see our desolation, and the city upon which Thy name is called, for it is not for our justifications, that we present our supplications before Thy face, but for the multitude of Thy tender mercies.*

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SECTION IV.

Vocal Prayer.

"Have a great respect for vocal prayer," says St. Theresa, "for it is a means by which the Lord subdues our tepidity, and prepares us for mental prayer." Be careful, however, not to burden yourself with too many prayers, for "It is better," as St. Jerome remarks, "to recite one Psalm with devotion, than the whole Psaltery with distractions." "It is better," as St. Theresa declares, "to say a single Pater Noster devoutly, than to recite the whole Rosary in a distracted and hurried manner." Accustom yourself to repeat often these words of the Lord's prayer: "Thy will be done. Lead us not into temptation;" which words include the substance of perfection. Endeavour that whilst making vocal prayer, your mind may be recollected in God, or fixed upon some devout mystery. The blessed Leonardo, during prayer, kept his mind fixed on the passion of Jesus Christ. What will it avail to honour God with our lips, if our hearts are glued down to earthly affections, and our

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thoughts employed only on the things of this world? How shall we hope that God will draw nigh to us, unless we approach and worship Him in spirit and truth? "He who in prayer considers not either to whom he is speaking, or of what he is treating, does neither honour God nor benefit his soul," says St. Theresa. We read of St. Bernard, that when he went to prayer he was accustomed to say, "*O ye solicitudes and thoughts of this world, I leave you that I may go and converse with my God.*" He who expects to derive profit from prayer, must endeavour to do the same, emptying, as much as possible, his heart and soul of all earthly cares. For this purpose St. John Chrysostom urges us to reflect on the attention which we pay when we are conversing with our friends about trifles, tales, or follies; and shall we neglect to be equally recollected when we speak to God of spiritual and heavenly subjects?

SECTION V.

Upon Mental Prayer.

When the patriarch Jacob was flying from the vindictive rage of Esau, he

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came one night to a vast plain, and lying down in this place, he fell into a sweet and tranquil sleep. In the midst of his rest there appeared to him a mysterious vision. He saw in his dream a very long ladder, which was placed on the earth, whilst the upper end rested on the highest point of heaven. Multitudes of angels ascended and descended this ladder, and God resting on the summit, looked down with eyes of tenderness upon the wondering Jacob, and renewed to him the promise which He had made to Abraham, to give to his posterity the land on which he reposed, and that in his descendants He would bless all the nations of the earth. This, O Christian soul, is a lively picture of that practice so continually recommended to all who wish to acquire the science of the saints; namely, of mental prayer or meditation. This practice is a mystical ladder which reaches up to heaven, because it detaches us from the love of this wretched world, and raises our desires and affections to the blessed country of heaven. Those who ascend and descend by these mysterious steps have the face of angels, because those who perform well this pious exercise all partake, in some degree, of the nature of

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angels, by the purity of their intention, by the sanctity of their actions, and by the heavenly love which inflames their hearts. God is resting on the top of the ladder, to show the especial providence with which He assists them, and the care which He takes to guide them through the dangerous journey of this life, and to receive them into his arms in paradise.

There is nothing which is more useful to purify our understanding from its ignorance, and our heart from all its depraved affections, than mental prayer, because it pours into our minds the brightness of divine light, and inflames our will by the warmth of heavenly love.

"*Thy word,*" exclaims the royal prophet, "*disperses all the darkness of my mind, and directs my steps into the right path: I felt my heart kindled with the fire of divine love, when I meditated upon the law of my Lord. O how often would I have fallen a prey to my own weakness, if I had not been supported by meditating on Thy law!*" Whence has arisen that corruption of manners which, like an impetuous torrent, rushes over the world? Surely it does not arise so much from a want of faith, as from a want of meditating on the truths of faith. Christians in general

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believe in eternal truths, but because they do not seriously consider them, they live as if they did not believe them. "*The earth,*" says the prophet Jeremiah, "*is full of desolation, because there is no one who thinks in his heart.*" Fire has power to burn wood which is dry, but unless it is brought near to the flame it is unable to kindle it with its heat; so the eternal maxims have power to detach our will from sin; but if they are not brought near to us by serious consideration, it is not possible for them to produce due effect. Where is, amongst Catholics, a man to be found who does not believe in hell? but because they will not reflect upon the severity and the eternity of its punishments, the greatest part of them live as if they did not believe it. Who does not know that death is inevitable? but because he does not reflect upon what it is to be deprived of everything, and to return to the earth, to become the food of worms, therefore a man lives as if he believed it not. Who knows not that God is offended by mortal sin? but because the sinner omits to meditate upon the awfulness of such an offence, and on the fearful evils which it brings upon the soul, therefore does he live as if

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he believed not. It is not possible to meditate seriously on the eternal maxims and go on sinning. Sin may exist amidst alms, hair shirts, fastings, and many other pious and devout exercises, but it cannot reign amidst the practice of pious and devout meditation, for we must either quit it, or abandon our sinful life. "Whoever perseveres," says St. Theresa, "in mental prayer, may hold for certain, that the Lord will, sooner or later, draw him out of the path of perdition, and conduct him to the gate of eternal life.

SECTION VI.

Upon aspirations and good thoughts.

Make frequent use, O Christian soul, of the prayers called *ejaculations*, which are short aspirations, and tender dartings of the soul towards God. When does the lover of earthly beauty forget to think upon the beloved object? And shall we be so blind as to let our days pass without once remembering God, without pouring out our heart to Him? without raising some short but fervent

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aspirations to the throne of His mercy? St. Francis of Assissim, used frequently to make use of this ejaculation, "My God and my All." The blessed Leornardo often said, "My Jesus, mercy!" St. Augustine repeated frequently, "Let me rather die, O my Lord, than ever again offend Thee." St. Ignatius said often to God, "Give me, O good God, Thy love with Thy grace, that is all I desire." Another holy soul frequently exclaimed, "Let me die for Thy love, O my Jesus, who hast vouchsafed to die for my love." Accustom yourself to draw some good thoughts from the various objects which present themselves to your sight. St. Francis of Assissim, felt himself moved whenever he looked upon a lamb, for it raised his thoughts up to the divine Lamb who was sacrificed for our sake. St. Fulgentius took pleasure in gazing upon the grandeur of the Roman nobles, because it carried his thoughts to the magnificence of the court of Heaven. And why cannot we do like these saints? Do you behold a stream which flows rapidly? Take occasion from this to think on the rapidity with which our life passes away? Do you hear a clash of thunder which bursts

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with an awful sound? Let it remind you of the dreadful agony of those miserable reprobates who are condemned to the eternal thunders of divine vengeance in Hell! Do you meet with a beautiful and pleasant garden? Let it inspire you with thoughts of the beauty of the just soul in which the Lord takes pleasure and delight. Do you approach the fire? Think of the cruel flames in which the damned will suffer eternally in Hell. Are you undressing? Reflect on the suffering of Jesus Christ when He was stripped of His garments, which adhered to His wounds, and were purple with His blood. Do you repose on your bed? Remember the fearful spectacle which your body must very soon exhibit upon this very bed, when it shall be extended thereon cold, and stiff, and motionless, and an object of horror to all who shall behold it. Amidst your daily occupations, cast often your looks towards the Lord, who is resting within your heart, waiting till you speak to Him. Imitate St. Bernard, who formed a cell in his heart, into which he frequently retired to hold sweet colloquies with His God. We read, likewise, in the life of St. Catharine of Sienna, that when she was

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deprived, by her relations, of her private chamber, she formed for herself one in her own heart, in which amidst all exterior occupations she could converse secretly with God. Oh how powerful is this practice of holy recollection in God to raise the soul to union with his divine Majesty!

SECTION VII.

On the practice of Mental Prayer.

The practice of mental prayer is divided into three parts: 1st. The Preparation. 2nd. The Consideration. 3rd. The Thanksgiving.

Before all, it is necessary to collect one's thoughts, to revive faith, and to prepare the heart for holy prayer. This preparation is made by putting yourself in the presence of God, and calling on Him for His divine aid. The best method of putting ourselves in the presence of God, is to imagine ourselves surrounded by God as a fish is surrounded by water. The Lord sees us everywhere; He supports us; He is all around us; He penetrates into our blood, our bones, our interior,

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into our marrow; He sees us when we pray to Him, and knows what feelings we entertain towards Him. After reviving the faith of the divine presence, say to Him, "Ah, my God, how can I ever dare to come into Thy presence to speak to Thee? I who am but dust and ashes. Shall I speak to Thee who art the King of kings, the Master of the universe, the sovereign Lord of all the potentates upon earth? To Thee who art seated on a throne resplendent with light, surrounded by thousands of blessed spirits, standing with downcast eyes in Thy presence, through the reverence they owe to Thee? I who merit to be cast away for ever from Thy face, on account of my sins? (Here take a slight retrospect of the sins of your past life.) O my God, my God, how great is Thy goodness towards me, who have been so ungrateful to Thy love! Ah, now I do hate my sins, I detest them, I abhor them, I would rather die than again offend Thee. Enlighten my mind, inflame my heart with Thy grace, that I may derive from this meditation the worthy fruit of prayer." Having thus made the preparation, read the point which is to form the subject of your meditation; then go on and think

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deeply upon it, without, however, doing any violence to your mind. If it is truth which falls under the senses, such as the life and passion of our divine Redeemer, hell, judgment, or the like, make it present to your imagination as if the event were passing before your eyes. Would you for example consider the crowning of our Lord with thorns? Imagine yourself to be at Jerusalem, and in the great court of the palace of the Roman Proconsul. Represent to yourself the holy Jesus, bleeding and lacerated, and bending under the blows, and the scourging, and His murderers employed in twisting the thorns into the crown with which they are about to torture Him, and which they are going to pierce into His temples with blows: then the blood which flows in torrents over His face, His breast, and His whole body, and flowing down to the ground, which is purpled and saturated with it. What, however, is most worthy of remark, and is the most important point in mental prayer, consists in making acts of the will, and forming holy resolutions to restrain our passions; to practise virtue; to walk in the way of divine love; and to conform ourselves

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in all things to the Divine will. These affections and resolutions should not be merely general but particular, and suited to our own peculiar wants.

At the end of the meditation, proceed to make acts of humility, of sorrow for your sins, and of divine love. It is also an excellent practice recommended by St. Peter of Alcantara, that of thanking God for His goodness and mercy. When you, for instance, meditate on Hell, thank the Lord who has freed you from eternal fire, as well as for all the other benefits which His especial bounty has heaped upon you.

Take care to recall from time to time, in the course of the day, the good resolutions made in meditation; and in the evening make it a subject of examination, and see in what way you have fulfilled them. It is also wisely recommended by masters of the spiritual life, to keep a little book to write down our purposes, that they may be imprinted on our minds; and to renew them by reading them often.

We must not allow ourselves to be disconcerted, if during the time of meditation any aridity should arise, for that would be to give up our arms and yield

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the victory to the enemy. If we find great difficulty in conceiving good thoughts, and devout affections, we must be satisfied to keep ourselves in the presence of God, with a tranquil and devout heart, and He will be pleased with our patience, and will give us a great reward in Heaven.

SECTION VIII.

Morning Prayers.

First, when you awake, bless yourself with the sign of the cross, and say:

+ Blessed be the holy and undivided Trinity, now and for ever.

Then turn your mind to your Divine Saviour, and say:

O Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, and save my soul.

After this call to mind the subject of your meditation.

In putting on your clothes, say:

O most loving Jesus, true Spouse of my soul, give me the wedding garment of divine love, and perpetual charity.

In washing yourself, say:

O my Lord Jesus, who hast redeemed us by Thy precious blood, purify, [be-

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seech Thee, my heart from the stain of sin, that I may serve Thee with perfect purity of body and soul.

After washing and dressing yourself kneel down, and say:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Blessed be the holy and undivided Trinity, now and for ever. Amen.

Our Father, &c. Hail Mary, &c. I believe in God, &c.

AN ACT OF FAITH.

I firmly believe, O Lord, that Thou art the only true and living God, subsisting in three divine persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that the Son was made man, suffered, and died upon the cross, for our salvation; and that afterwards He rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven, from thence he shall come to repay the just with everlasting glory, and the wicked with everlasting punishment. I most firmly believe all these truths, as well as all others which Thy holy Catholic Church teaches, because they come from Thee, who art the infallible truth, and who hast revealed them to this Thy Church.

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AN ACT OF HOPE.

O my God, relying on Thy Almighty power, and Thy infinite mercy and goodness, and because Thou art faithful to Thy promises, I trust in Thee, and hope that, through the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Thou wilt grant to me the pardon of my sins, and the grace to live and die in Thy holy love, and to arrive in the end at Thy eternal kingdom, which Thou hast promised to those who lead a good Christian life, as I now resolve to do, with the help of Thy holy grace.

AN ACT OF CHARITY.

I love Thee, O my God, and am resolved to love Thee always, with my whole heart and soul, not only on account of the manifold favours and blessings which I have already received from Thee, and those which I still hope to receive from Thy bountiful hand, but much more because Thou art Thyself an infinite good, worthy of being loved above all things; and for Thy sake I also do, and will ever love my neighbour as myself.

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AN ACT OF CONTRITION.

Have pity on me, O God of mercy, have pity on me, my heart is penetrated with grief and sorrow for the many offences which I have committed against Thy infinite majesty. I now hate and detest them above every evil, not only because by them I have polluted my immortal soul, forfeited all claim to the joys of paradise, and deserved to be cast into hell, but still more because, by yielding to sin, I have offended Thee, who art a God so great, so good, so amiable, and therefore worthy of infinite love. Ah! would that I had rather died than have ever offended Thee! But now I firmly resolve, O Lord, by the assistance of Thy holy grace, never more to offend Thee for the time to come.

AN ACT OF ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING.

O eternal God, the beginning and the end of all things, in whom we live, move, and are; I humbly adore Thy infinite majesty, and with all the powers of my soul I exalt and magnify Thy holy name. Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive

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honour, and glory, and praise, and benediction. I thank Thee for creating me after Thy own image and likeness, for redeeming me with the precious blood of Thy Son, for sanctifying me with Thy Holy Spirit, and for having hitherto preserved me, and brought me safely to the beginning of this day. Ah, what return shall I make to Thee for all the blessings which Thou hast bestowed upon me?

AN ACT OF OBLATION.

Receive, O Lord, my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my will. All that I have, and all that I possess, has come to me from Thy bountiful hand, to Thee, therefore, do I entirely restore it, and to Thy guidance do I freely resign it. Grant me only, dear Lord, Thy love, with Thy grace, and I shall be rich enough, and I will neither ask nor seek for anything further.

A PETITION TO THE FATHER.

O God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, who saidst in the beginning, "Let there be light," and it was made, enlighten my mind, that I

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may never sleep in sin, lest at any time the deceits of the enemy, or my own corruption, should prevail against me.

A PETITION TO THE SON.

O God, the Son, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the perfect image of His person, the true light, who shineth in darkness, drive away from me all darkness of sin and ignorance, and give me understanding, that I may value the infinite blessings which Thou hast bestowed upon me, and that I may profit by them for Thy honour and glory, and the eternal salvation of my soul.

TO THE HOLY SPIRIT.

O God the Holy Ghost, who inflamest the wills of those in whom thou vouchsafest to dwell with the fire of Thy love, pour into my heart the gift of Thy holy charity, that despising all vain and transitory things, I may, with a burning desire, long for the true and everlasting joys of Thy heavenly kingdom.

A DEVOUT RECOMMENDATION

To Thee, O Lord, I commend my soul and body, my relations and benefac-

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tors, my friends and familiars, and all those for whom I am in any way bound to offer up my prayers. To Thee I commend the holy Catholic Church, and beg of Thee to lead all her children to the attainment of eternal life. To Thee I commend all those who go astray from the path of truth, and are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. Grant, O Lord, that all may know Thee, all may honour and reverence Thee, all may love Thee, and be loved by Thee. Lastly, I commend all universally to Thy holy protection, that Thou wilt vouchsafe to the living forgiveness of their sins, and to the souls departed, everlasting rest. Amen.

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Hail, Mary, most humble handmaid of the blessed Trinity! Hail, Mary, daughter of the eternal Father! Hail, Mary, chaste spouse of the Holy Ghost! Hail, Mary, most admirable mother of our Lord Jesus Christ! Hail, Mary, queen of

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angels and of all saints, assist me by thy intercession, and obtain for me the grace of imitating thy sublime virtues, and attaining to an intimate union with Thy divine Son, Jesus Christ. Grant me now thy all-powerful help, and in the hour of my death receive, I beseech thee, my soul, and offer it to thy sweet Son Jesus, that for thy sake He may accept it, and place it amongst the blessed choirs of celestial spirits. Amen.

PRAYER TO OUR GUARDIAN ANGEL.

O holy angel, who art appointed by the divine goodness to be my guardian, to conduct my blindness, to teach my ignorance, to strengthen my weakness, and to excite my slothfulness; I heartily praise our common Lord for so singular a benefit, and thank thee for the many good offices which thou hast done unto me, defending me amidst so many dangers of body and soul. I humbly beseech thee to continue the same care in my behalf, until thou shalt have brought my soul into the happy port of everlasting salvation.

After this make your meditation.

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SECTION IX.

Evening Prayers.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Blessed be the holy and undivided Trinity, now, and for ever. Amen.

Our Father, &c. Hail Mary, &c. I believe in God, &c.

ACTS OF ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING.

Eternal God, who, dwelling in the highest heavens, dost vouchsafe to regard the lowest creatures upon earth, I humbly bow down before Thy sacred presence, and adore Thy majesty. Thou art my Creator, O my God, and beneficent protector. Thou art my first beginning and my last end; under the shadow of Thy wings is perpetual repose, and from the light of Thy countenance flow perpetual joy and felicity. To Thee be honour and glory, to Thee adoration and obedience from all Thy creatures. And now, O most gracious and bountiful Lord, with my whole strength, and with all the faculties of my soul, I thank Thee for

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Thy great and innumerable benefits, which proceed purely from Thy bounty, and are directed entirely for my good, particularly for preserving me this day amidst so many dangers, and for delivering me from those evils and miseries, which I have merited by my sins.

Ask light and grace for discovering and detesting your Sins.

O sweet and merciful Jesus, true and never-failing light, illuminating every man who comes into this world; vouchsafe, I beseech Thee, to enlighten my understanding, and to inflame my heart, that I may know my sins, and conceive a lively sorrow and purpose of amendment.

Here examine diligently what sins you have committed during the day, by thought, word, deed, or omission. Afterwards say:

I confess to Almighty God, to Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, to Blessed Michael the Archangel, to Blessed John the Baptist, to the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and to all the saints, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, through my fault, through my

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fault, through my most grievous fault. Therefore, I beseech the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, the blessed Michael the Archangel, the blessed John the Baptist, the holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, and all the Saints, to pray to the Lord our God for me.

AN ACT OF CONTRITION.

O eternal God, my most loving and merciful Father! I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy servant, much less to be accounted Thy child, having repaid Thy bounty with contempt, and Thy benefits with ingratitude. Oh! how could I, who am the work of Thy hands, and who was purchased by the blood of Thy divine Son, who expired on the Cross for my salvation; how could I dare rebel against Thee, and offend Thy infinite Majesty. Alas! it is dreadful to provoke the wrath of the living God! But what chiefly grieves my heart is, that I have offended against a God of infinite goodness, who is worthy of all my love. How shall I, O Lord, express my detestation of all the crimes I have committed? Have pity on me, O merciful Lord, and spare me for the sake

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of Thy beloved Son. Turn away Thy face from my sins, and blot out my iniquities. Forgive, O Lord! forgive, and bear not the sins of my past life in remembrance. Look upon me, O my God! not in Thine anger, but according to the tender bowels of Thine infinite mercy, for Thou art our Father, and we are Thy children; Thou art our Maker, and we are all as clay in Thy hands. Thou canst cleanse all our defilement with those waters which flow from the fountains of Thy beloved Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, and with one drop of His blood Thou canst mould us again into vessels of honour. From Thee, O merciful Father, I beg, and hope for pardon; upon Thee I call, and to Thee I trust for help, whereby I may hereafter constantly serve Thee, with a true and faithful obedience, and be inseparably united to Thee with a pure and perfect love, for ever. Amen.

AN ACT OF PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT.

O Almighty and eternal God, I would from the bottom of my heart, that I had never sinned against Thee; but since I have been so unhappy as to sin against

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Thy infinite Majesty, O grant me now Thy grace, that I may never do so again; Thou hast said, "I will not the death of a sinner, but rather that he be converted and live;" convert me, then, and save my soul. "Have mercy on me, according to Thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquities." I abhor and detest all my sins, and firmly purpose to walk henceforth in the path of holiness and justice. Accept, O Lord, of this my resolution, and grant that by the help of Thy holy grace, and through the infinite merits of thine only Son our Lord Jesus Christ, I may keep it faithfully during the whole course of my life. O most gracious and bountiful Lord, Thou hast ordained the day for labour, and the night for us to take our rest; I praise Thee for the blessings of this past day, and I beseech Thee to protect me during this night. Look upon me with a merciful eye, and let Thy holy angels keep their watch over me, that, being safely delivered from all dangers, I may be enabled to perform so faithfully the duties of my state, that having passed my days in Thy holy service and love, I may end them in Thy favour, and reign

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with Thee for ever, in Thy heavenly kingdom through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who with Thee, and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth ever one God, world without end. Amen.

A PRAYER TO OUR BLESSED LADY.

Hail! O most holy and Blessed Virgin Mary, full of celestial grace, and replenished with beauty and loveliness, of whom our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King of Heaven, the brightness of His Father's glory, was pleased to be born and nourished: obtain for me, O Blessed Lady, of your only-begotten Son, whatsoever you know to be necessary for the salvation of my soul. O Holy Mother of God, help my frailty and weakness: assist me by your powerful intercession at all times, but especially at the hour of my death, that I may overcome the devil, and reach safely the port of eternal life. Hail! Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope, to Thee do we cry, poor banished sons of Eve; to Thee do we send our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy

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towards us, and after the conclusion of this our exile, shew unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus. O most clement, most pious, and most sweet Virgin Mary.

TO OUR ANGEL GUARDIAN.

O Angel of God, to whose holy care I am committed by the mercy of our heavenly Father; enlighten, govern, and defend me this night, from all sins and dangers.

A PRAYER FOR THE DEAD.

Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication, If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it? For with Thee there is merciful forgiveness; and by reason of Thy law, I have waited for Thee, O Lord. My soul has relied on Thy word; my soul has hoped in the Lord. From the morning watch even until night, let Israel trust in the Lord. Because with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him plentiful redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

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Give them, O Lord, eternal rest, and let perpetual light shine upon them.

LET US PRAY.

O God, the Creator and Redeemer of all the faithful, give unto the souls of Thy servants departed the remission of all their sins; that by pious supplications, they may obtain the pardon which they have ever desired: who liveth and reigneth, world without end. Amen.

℣. Give them, O Lord, eternal rest.
℟. And let perpetual light shine upon them.
℣. May they rest in peace.
℟. Amen.

THE BLESSING, &c.

God the Father, bless me; Jesus Christ, defend and keep me; the virtue of the Holy Ghost enlighten, and sanctify me, this night and for ever. Amen.

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CHAPTER II.

UPON DEVOTION TO THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST.

A true devotion to the passion of Jesus Christ is a great means to make us hate sin, and to inflame us with divine love. How is it possible for us to indulge in pride, if we attentively meditate upon our Lord, who for our sake humbled Himself so as to become the contempt of men, and the outcast of the people? How shall we dare to seek after sensual gratifications, if we contemplate our Lord, who for our sins delivered Himself up to be scourged, to torture, to agony, and in fine, to a most painful and ignominious death? How shall a man continue to be inordinately attached to riches, when he beholds his Lord living amidst poverty, and dying despoiled of everything, even his very garments? How shall he think of revenging injuries when he looks on Jesus, who endured without a complaint every sort of insult, blows, blasphemies, and curses, and who was unjustly condemned to die upon an infamous cross, as if He had been one of the

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most abominable of malefactors? How shall his heart not be moved to love Him, who for his love sacrificed His life amidst the bitterest anguish? How not cling close to the bosom of Jesus, when we behold the excess of suffering with which He was loaded, for love of us, from His birth to the last moment of His life? Ah no, it is not possible to reflect deeply on the passion of Jesus Christ, without feeling in our heart a great hatred for sin, and an ardent desire to be entirely melted by Divine love. "The wounds of Jesus," says St. Bernard, "are as darts which pierce the hardest sinners; they are flames which enkindle a heart of ice." "The passion of Jesus Christ," observes St. Augustine, "is the best remedy which we can apply to heal the wounds of our souls, and enable us to walk in the path of divine love. Happy is he who is so fortunate as to possess the science of the Cross, for he possesses all things. Woe to him who is a stranger to this science, for he possesses nothing." There is not any knowledge better worth acquiring than that of tender meditation on the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. "This, "says St. Bernard, "is a perfect

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philosophy,—a sublime science, to know Jesus and Him crucified."

Be, therefore, very devout to the passion of Jesus Christ, if you desire to walk securely in the way of holiness and to attain perfection. "As young children," observes St. Francis of Sales, "by listening to their mothers learn to speak, in imitation of them, so by remaining close to our Saviour in meditation, by taking notice of His actions, His words, His feelings, we shall learn, through His grace, to speak, and to act as He did." That we may make such meditation with profit, we must reflect attentively. 1st. Who is He that suffers? 2ndly. For whom does He suffer? 3rdly. Why does He suffer? and 4thly. To what end does He suffer?

CHAPTER III.

UPON DEVOTION TO MOST HOLY MARY.

It has never been heard that any one has been lost, who had a true devotion to Mary. The infernal enemy has not power enough to drag any one to perdition whom this good Mother keeps, like a dear

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child, under the mantle of her protection. Can it be that Jesus will not listen to those who are devout to His beloved Mother, who forms so especially the joy of His heart? Could it be that Jesus would not behold, with looks of particular favour, those souls, who employ their lives in loving, honouring, and glorifying this dear Mother, who is the sweetest object of His complacency? Could it be that Jesus would suffer those to fall a prey to the infernal enemy, who are devout to her, who by having given birth to Him has crushed the serpent's head and triumphed over his pride?

Be, then, from your heart, devout to most holy Mary, and consider yourself most happy to live under her patronage. Be not afraid that you can go too far in love and respect towards her, for how shall we love and respect too much, her who has been raised by God Himself to the sublime dignity of being His mother? And how far does the tribute of honour and glory, which we pay to Mary, extend? Does it not terminate in God Himself, who is wonderful in His saints, and has deigned to bestow on His Mother all those excellent gifts and prerogatives which we reverence in her? Do we not praise the

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liberality, the greatness, and the loveliness of God Himself, when we honour Mary for the wonderful graces with which He has vouchsafed to enrich her? Ah! let us remember that we were confided to Mary's care, to be her sons, by God Himself, when, on the cross, he commended her, as our Mother, to St. John, and therefore He would have us honour, respect, and love her, as devoted children.

Let us remember the words of St. Bernard, that Jesus Christ so loved His Mother, that He has made her the channel of His graces, so that every heavenly gift passes through her hands. Let us, lastly, remember that all the saints were full of affection and tenderness for this dear Mother, which caused them to instil her devotion and love into all hearts. "Dear children," used to say St. Philip Neri, to the little ones, "Love holy Mary, love holy Mary." Oh! what benefit our souls would reap if they were but sincerely devoted to Mary, the Mother of fair love and sweet hope! Ah, well may they feel certain of their salvation, who give themselves entirely to glorify this great Mother, most especially by the imitation of her virtues, and the

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purity of their manners. "*Qui elucidant me vitam æternam habebunt.*"

And be not satisfied, O Christian soul, to be acquainted only in theory with the value of the devotion to most holy Mary, but endeavour to practise it by honouring her, and especially by invoking her assistance in the time of temptation. Holy Mary shines in the Church like a star in heaven, to point out the way of salvation to us; therefore, whenever we find ourselves in danger of shipwreck, amid the storms of this world, let us raise our eyes to this star, calling upon her with St. Bernard to help us: "*In dubiis in periculis respice stellam, voca Mariam.*"

CHAPTER IV.

ON SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION.

SECTION I.

Nature of this Sacrament, and proper dispositions for receiving it worthily.

The Sacrament of Penance, or Sacramental Confession, was established by

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our Lord Jesus Christ, for the purpose of cleansing our souls from the sins we commit after baptism, and restoring us again to the friendship of God. This work of interior purification, or cleansing of our soul from the stain of sin, is effected by the infusion of the sanctifying grace, or divine charity, which is here poured out in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

The chief dispositions which are requisite on our part for receiving worthily this holy sacrament, are the following:

I. A hatred and detestation of our sins, with a firm resolution of avoiding them for the time to come. This constitutes the contrition of heart, which possesses a wonderful efficacy towards appeasing the anger of God, and making Him propitious to us, for, as holy David says, "a contrite and humble heart, God will not despise."

II. A sincere and ready will to make atonement to the divine justice for the sins we have committed, and to perform all such penances as shall be appointed to us in satisfaction for them.

III. An humble and entire confession of all the sins whereby we have grievously offended His Divine Majesty. These

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dispositions are so essentially required on our part, for worthily approaching the holy tribunal of penance, that if any one of them be wanting, the sentence of absolution pronounced upon us by the minister of God, instead of delivering us from sin, would only increase our malice and sinfulness in the sight of God.

In order to approach the holy tribunal with these dispositions, we must begin by offering our most earnest prayers to the throne of God, begging light and grace from Him, that we may see wherein we have offended his Divine Majesty. Daily experience teaches us, that when there is question of knowing ourselves, and acknowledging our own faults, we are most apt to be deceived by self-love. How often are we startled with things of little moment, whilst, on the other side, we overlook things which are of the most serious consequence? Whoever, therefore, desires to shield himself from the delusion of self-love, in the great work of knowing himself, and to discover his own faults, must begin by addressing the Father of light, beseeching Him to enlighten his darkness, and to show him wherein he has offended His Divine Majesty.

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But as Almighty God requires that we should co-operate with His grace, so after having invoked the necessary light from above, we must apply ourselves to examine our conscience with all diligence, in order to find out our sins; and we shall be greatly assisted to make this examination well, by representing ourselves before the judgment seat of Christ, and thinking on those things which would give us trouble or uneasiness at such a fearful hour.

In making this examination, we must be on our guard lest we commit the following faults. In the first place we must beware of giving way to over-anxiety and trouble of mind. There are some persons who are never satisfied with the manner in which they examine themselves, but after having spent a long time in this exercise, and taken great care in order to discover their faults, allow themselves to be tormented with the apprehension of not having performed it in a proper manner, thinking that there is something else that they have not sufficiently examined. In order to avoid this fault, let us apply ourselves to the holy investigation with a calm and peaceful mind, being mindful of what is said by the saints, that the Sa-

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crament of Penance is not a torture of the conscience, as was blasphemously asserted by Luther, but a tribunal of mercy, where God displays, in an especial manner, His bounty towards poor miserable sinners. Let us use a prudent diligence in order to discover our faults, and then let us place our greatest confidence in the mercy and goodness of God, who does not wish for the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live. And if it happen that we should forget any sin, this will not prevent us from receiving absolution from it, only we must take care to mention it in our next confession, in case it should afterwards occur to our memory. The other fault against which we must guard ourselves, is proper of those persons who, although they seldom approach the holy tribunal, and live but very careless lives, yet in preparing for confession, they satisfy themselves with casting a slight and superficial glance upon their conscience, without scarcely taking any pains to enter deeply into themselves, and to sound the bottom of their heart. This fault is much more serious than the former, and the persons who are subject to it, may rest assured that their negli-

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gence and sluggishness, in a work of such importance, is most displeasing to God, and prejudicial to their souls. After having attained the necessary knowledge of our sins, we must apply ourselves to conceive a proper sorrow and detestation for them. And here let us remember, that in order to perform well the act of sorrow, it is not sufficient that we read it from some book, or express it with our lips, but it is necessary, that having entered into ourselves, we should bewail our sins from our very heart; for true contrition does not consist in the expression of our mouth, but in the grief of our soul. Hence God, speaking to His people of old, who seemed to care more for the exterior protestation of grief, than for true contrition of heart, He tells them, by means of His holy prophet, "to rend their hearts, and not their garments." This sorrow, which must come from the heart, and express the grief and affliction of our soul, for having offended our most bountiful Lord, should be *universal* and *efficacious*. That it may be universal, it must extend to every grievous sin without exception; and that it may be efficacious, it must leave a firm resolution in our will never more to offend

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God, cost what it may, and to avoid the occasions of sin, especially those which we know, by experience, have already been ruinous to our souls. Whilst on the one hand we must take care lest our sorrow be a mere expression of our lips, and not that of our heart; on the other, we must beware lest we confound true contrition of the heart, which resides in the rational will, with the sensible feelings of grief, which dwell in the sensitive faculties of the soul. Some persons hearing that the sorrow which we must have for our sins must come from the heart, imagine that they cannot conceive true contrition, unless they experience such a sensible emotion and grief in their heart, as one usually perceives at the death of a dear friend, of a beloved parent, or for any grievous misfortune which befalls them. With this opinion in their head they strain and force themselves to excite such a sensible sorrow; if they succeed in this, they are content, and think all is well, flattering themselves that they have true contrition, and sometimes even vainly esteeming themselves on that occount; but if they cannot succeed to obtain this sensible sorrow, they are cast down and dejected,

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think all is lost, and give themselves up to the most painful anxiety and anguish of soul. But this is a great and dangerous illusion, for the sorrow which is necessary for the remission of sin, is an act of our rational will, and can exist with perfection in our souls, without any emotion in our sensitive powers. Moreover, sensitive emotions of sorrow may be the effect of mere natural tenderness, and may arise from natural motives alone, without having anything to do with true contrition, consequently we ought neither to depend much upon them, nor be dejected and afraid merely because we are deprived of them. True sorrow or contrition of the heart is thus described in Holy Scripture, "You shall remember your wicked ways, and your doings that were not good, and your iniquities, and your wicked deeds shall displease you." (Ezech. xxxvi. 31.) Where we see that the true sorrow which God requires from us consists in this, that we be thoroughly convinced of the evil of sin, principally on account of the injury it does to God, that we sincerely regret and repent for having been guilty of such an offence, and that we be seriously determined, at all events, to

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fly from sin for the future, and to use every means in our power in order to persevere in the love and service of God. Having thus examined our conscience, and excited ourselves to contrition, let us approach the holy tribunal in full confidence of the divine mercy. In making our confession, let us beware lest we accuse ourselves of faults in a *negative* and *general* way only, but let us specify the particular kind of sin we have committed. There are some persons, as St. Francis of Sales remarks, who, in making their confession, are accustomed to accuse themselves in these and other such general terms: I have not loved God as I ought; I have not prayed with so much devotion as I might; I have not been so patient as I ought, &c. Now we must take care to avoid these and other similar accusations, because in them no particular sin is mentioned, by which the director can possibly understand the exact position of our conscience, since all men upon earth, even those who are most conspicuous for sanctity, might say the same, and, therefore, instead of making such useless accusations, let us take care to find out and confess the particular faults which we have committed.

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Thus, instead of accusing ourselves of not having prayed with so much devotion as we ought, let us see whether we have failed, by admitting voluntary distractions, by not choosing a convenient place or time, &c., and as we shall find ourselves faulty, so let us accuse ourselves with all sincerity; and here we must remember, that when there is question of mortal sins, if we can discover the exact number of them, we are strictly bound to declare it in confession, for this is necessary that our director may be able to form a proper judgment of the state of our soul; and if a person cannot exactly remember how often he has fallen into grievous sin, let him, upon reflection, make the best guess he can, and sincerely state it in confession, as near to the truth as he is able. But if it happen that he has lived in the habit of sin for any length of time, so as to have frequently relapsed into the same crime, he needs not then trouble himself about finding out the exact number of sins he has committed, but let him mention the length of time in which he has lived in that sinful state, adding, if possible, how many times, upon an average, he had

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fallen into sin every day, or every week, or every month.

SECTION II.

DEVOTIONS FOR CONFESSION.

A Prayer before Examination of Conscience.

O God of infinite majesty, before whom the pillars of the firmament tremble, and the heavenly hosts bow down in humble adoration; O God of infinite wisdom, who searches the hearts and the reins, and to whom nothing is hidden, whether in heaven or upon earth, behold here prostrate at Thy feet, a poor miserable sinner, imploring Thy grace. Thou who art the true light that shineth in darkness, vouchsafe to enlighten my understanding, that I may penetrate into the recesses of my heart, and clearly perceive the state of my conscience. Shed a ray of Thy light into my soul, and make me know the number and malice of my iniquities, as I shall know them when I shall appear before Thy judgment-seat to give Thee a strict account of my life.

I desire, like the prodigal child, to abandon the ways of sin, and enter into

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the path of holiness and justice. If, for the past, I have been so wicked as to turn my back upon Thee, now I desire to return to Thee, my most bountiful and loving Father. But how shall I be able to effect this, unless Thou vouchsafest to draw me to Thee by the unction of Thy Holy Spirit, and by the sweet attraction of Thy holy grace? This grace, then, I humbly implore, prostrate in spirit before the throne of Thy mercy. I know Thou desirest not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live; I know Thy mercies are above all Thy works; trusting, therefore, on this Thy mercy, I prostrate myself before Thy infinite Majesty, and beg of Thee, that as Thou hast spared me so long, and hast now given me this desire of returning to Thee, so Thou wilt complete the work which Thou hast mercifully begun, and receive me again into the number of Thy beloved children. I beg this grace for the sake of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who died upon the cross for my sins. Look down, O divine Father, upon the face of this Thy divine Son, and by the merits of His bitter sufferings, by the effusion of His most sacred blood, by His crucifixion and death, vouchsafe to dispel darkness

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from my understanding, and to break the hardness of my heart, that I may discover and detest all the malice and sinfulness of which I am guilty in Thy sight.

Most holy Virgin Mary, turn your merciful eyes upon me a sinner, and obtain for me, from your divine Son, a perfect knowledge and detestation of my sins, and that I may duly bewail and confess them, so as to be found worthy to receive the remission and forgiveness of them. O ye angels and saints, who stand before the throne of God, burning with divine charity, pray for me, that I may reap worthy fruits of penance.

AN ACT OF CONTRITION.

How enormous, O my soul! are the sins thou hast committed! See what thou hast done, and weep—thou hast offended a God of infinite wisdom, of ineffable goodness, of indescribable beauty; a God of all perfection, who forms the glory of the elect, and the delight of Paradise; a God the source of all good, from whom alone proceeds all that is beautiful, noble, or delightful in the whole creation. Oh! how couldst thou

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rebel against so good a Lord? Is He not thy Creator, thy Preserver, thy Redeemer? What could He have done for thee, more than He has done? For thee He was born in a wretched hovel, in nakedness and misery. For thee He was oppressed with blows; He was beaten with stripes; He was spitten upon; He was mocked; He was tortured with a crown of thorns; He was treated as the reproach of men, and the outcast of His people. For thee He was bruised and lacerated in every part of His body; He endured a long and cruel agony; He shed to the last drop, all His most precious blood; He died upon the cross drowned in a sea of suffering and shame; He left thee in the Eucharistic Sacrament His most holy flesh, to console and restore thy weakness; He has prepared for thee in Heaven a kingdom of eternal blessedness, and yet thou hast dared to insult Him! Thou hast despised His honour; thou hast torn His loving heart; thou hast trodden under-foot His most precious blood; thou hast re-opened His adorable wounds; thou hast crucified Him afresh by thy sins. Behold, ungrateful soul, how perverse has been thy conduct; behold what thou hast done by

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thy prevarications. Thou hast grievously offended thy God! thy loving Father! thy supreme Benefactor; thy sweetest Spouse; thy most tender Friend; thy only Good; thy Life; thy Treasure; thy All. Oh! why does not this thought pierce me to the heart? I, a vile creature, have offended my Creator. I, the vilest of worms, have dared to insult the God of all majesty and glory! The God who holds in His hands the thread of my existence. The God who could strike me dead at any moment with His lightnings. This God so great, before whom the whole human race is less than a grain of sand, which is scarcely discernible to the eye. I, dust and ashes, have offended the supreme Monarch of the universe; I have offended Him, whilst He was heaping immense benefits upon me; I have offended Him, voluntarily turning my back upon Him, and insolently despising Him; and I have offended Him for a trifle, for a vile pleasure, for a fancy, for a base gratification! And I have done it in His very presence, under His own eyes; and I have offended Him at the risk of His tremendous wrath; at the danger of being for ever cast out from His pre-

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sence, and of being for ever crushed under the weight of His awful vengeance. O God! why do I not fall dead at Thy feet, for grief of having offended Thee? Ah! Lord, I blush for having so often ill-treated Thee! I repent of having so often despised Thy grace, Thy friendship. Oh! would that my heart would break, through vehemence of grief! Deign, O Lord, to cast a glance at this ungrateful creature, who returns to Thee filled with shame and sorrow at the thought of having offended Thy infinite Majesty. Ah! I have too often sinned! I merit not to be called Thy son, nor that Thou shouldst be my Father. For me it will be too great a favour if thou placest me among the lowest of Thy servants: but Thou dost still offer me Thy grace; Thou callest me to Thy bosom; Thou invitest me again to Thine arms; Thou wishest again to clasp me to Thy heart. I am resolved to escape from the bondage of sin. I will cease to carry on a war with Thee. I hate all the sins which I have committed, whether great or small, and I desire rather to die, than to return to offend Thee, who art infinitely deserving of all my love. I protest solemnly before heaven and

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earth, that I will no longer live, nor act, nor speak, nor breathe, but for Thee, in Thee, with Thee. Yes, dearest Jesus! I will rather die than return to my sins.

PRAYER AFTER CONFESSION.

I thank Thee, O loving Father, for having washed away the stains of my sins, and for having admitted me again into Thy friendship and love. Ah! wo to me if Thou hadst treated me according to my deserts, and not according to the multitude of Thy mercies! Wo to me, if instead of exhibiting Thy bounties, and showing forth Thy goodness, Thou hadst exercised over me the right of Thy justice. I may truly say with Thy holy servant David, "If God had not spared me, my soul would dwell in the bottomless pit of Hell, as in its proper abode." Yes, if the abyss of Thy mercy had not triumphed over the abyss of my wickedness; if where iniquity has abounded, Thy grace had not superabounded, I should be this very moment one of the most wretched beings which have ever existed: I should be a reprobate, a child of malediction, a son of perdition, condemned to eternal torments, in the region

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of eternal death, where no order but perpetual horror inhabiteth.

"Ah! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all He has done for thee; who forgiveth all thy iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion."

Ah! would that I had never offended Thee, O my most sweet, most tender, most affectionate, most loving Father! But since I have had the misfortune of sinning against Thy infinite Majesty, I thank Thee for Thy excessive charity, in drawing me from the state of sin, and restoring me again to the state of grace. Vouchsafe, O dear Lord, to perfect the good work which Thou hast begun, by giving me grace to avoid falling again into sin for the future, and to persevere in Thy holy service and love. Imprint in the bottom of my heart the deepest hatred of sin; inflame my heart with the holy fire of charity, and make me walk in holiness and justice during the remainder of my life. May I put Thee, O Lord, as a seal upon my heart, as a seal upon my arm, so as to sigh after

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Thee alone all the days of my life, until the happy hour come when I shall enter into Thy joy. May I say now and for evermore, "My God and my all, the God of my heart, and my portion for ever."

CHAPTER V.

ON HOLY COMMUNION.

SECTION I.

The nature, the object, and the advantages of Holy Communion.

The Holy Communion is a participation of the true and real body and blood of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is given us in this holy Sacrament, under the appearances of bread and wine.* "The chalice of benediction

* The Holy Church teaches, first, that in the blessed Eucharist the substance of bread is really and truly changed into that of the body, and the substance of wine into that of the blood of Christ. Secondly, That the soul and divinity of Christ are truly and really present together with His sacred body and blood, in the blessed Eucharist, not by any change of the substance of bread and wine into them, but by way of *concomitency*, as the council of Trent declares, namely, by virtue

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which we bless," says St. Paul, "is it not the communion of the blood of Christ, and the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord?" This holy Sacrament has been established by our Lord Jesus Christ. 1st. For God's greater honour and glory; inasmuch as it exhibits God's infinite wisdom, as well as superabundant charity towards men. 2ndly. For the *sanctification* of our souls, for it is by excellence the sacrament of charity, which has an especial efficacy towards inflaming us with divine love, and raising us to an intimate union with His divine Majesty. This is declared by Jesus Christ Himself in these words, "I am the living bread that came down from Heaven, if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever, and the bread which I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world. He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day. He that eateth My flesh

of that intimate connection which now exists, and will for ever exist, between the body and blood of Christ and his soul and divinity. It is, therefore, perfectly right to assert, as I have asserted in the "Church of the living God," that the substance of bread and wine cannot be changed in the blessed Eucharist, into the soul or divinity of Christ.

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and drinketh my blood, abideth in Me, and I in him; He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me," (John vi.) 3rd. For the remembrance of His own passion and death, which is commemorated in an especial manner in this holy mystery, according to those words of St. Paul, "As often as you shall eat this bread, and drink this chalice, you shall show forth the death of the Lord, until He comes." (1 Cor. xi. 26. The chief disposition which is absolutely necessary, in order to receive worthily the Holy Communion, consists in the state of grace, or in being free from all mortal sin. The doctrine of St. Paul on this subject is no less decisive than fearful: "Let a man prove himself," says he, "and then let him eat of that bread, and drink of that chalice. Whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord." The virtues which ought to shine most in him who wishes to draw great fruit from the Holy Communion, are the following: The first is, a *lively faith*, captivating our understand-

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ing in obedience to Christ, and making faith supply the defect of our senses, according to what Holy Church teaches us. However high and sublime this mystery may be; however it may exceed our weak comprehension, yet we have an infallible certainty of its truth, and this certainty rests upon the infallible word of the Son of the living God, who is the way, the truth, and the life, the sovereign Lord of the universe, to whom all power is given in Heaven and on earth, the King of immortal glory, in whom are hid all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God. What wonder if an omnipotent Lord can do infinitely more than we can comprehend? What exhibition of love can be too great for Him, who has shed His blood, and died in the midst of the most excruciating torments, upon a gibbet for our sake? Let us, then, bow down in humble adoration before the Son of the living God, who has the words of eternal life, and approach to receive Him in the Holy Communion, impressed with the liveliest faith of his divine presence. Let us welcome Him into our heart, and whilst favoured with his divine presence within our bosom, let us acknowledge Him with St. Thomas,

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for "our Lord and our God." The second, is a *profound humility.* When Moses approached to the burning bush, he was commanded to take his shoes from off his feet, in reverence to the heavenly Being, who was there present. The same command was given to Joshua, by the angel, who appeared to him in the fields; how much more respect is due to the King of angels, who is present with us in the holy Eucharist? The seraphim in Heaven cover their faces with their wings, when they approach the throne of God, and the four-and-twenty elders cast down their crowns upon the ground, and prostrate themselves before the Lamb; how much more ought we, poor, miserable, sinful creatures, to prostrate ourselves in spirit, with the most profound humility, when we go to receive this adorable Lamb of God into our souls? St. Elizabeth, being instructed by the Holy Ghost in the great mystery of the Incarnation, was amazed that the Blessed Virgin had come to her, and cried out in a rapture of surprize, "Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" How much more reason have we, when we approach to holy communion, to

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cry out in our hearts, with astonishment, "Whence is this to me, that my Lord and God should come to my soul."

The third, is an *unshaken confidence* in Him, of whose mercies there is no number, and of whose goodness the treasure is infinite. We learn from Holy Scripture, that one of the chief dispositions for obtaining favours and blessings from Christ, was a lively confidence in His bounty. The woman with an issue of blood was cured through her great confidence in Him, by only touching the hem of His garment—and the good centurion obtained that Jesus should work the most stupendous prodigy, in raising his son from death, because he approached him with a profound humility, and unshaken confidence in His power and goodness. Let us, then, approach with the same dispositions the holy Table, and we shall draw from that fountain of grace the waters of salvation, which spring up to eternal life. Christ himself pressingly invites us to this confidence, saying, "Come to me, all ye that labour and are heavily laden, and I will refresh you."

The fourth, is a *fervent love of God.* For the fervent love of Jesus is the nup-

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tial garment which fits us for being admitted to His heavenly banquet, and for partaking of His celestial feast. The Holy Communion is the great Sacrament of divine charity, the great mystery of divine love, where our loving Jesus displays His infinite goodness, and exhausts as it were the riches of His love for men. We ought, therefore, to take care to draw nigh to it with a heart filled with charity, and thus return love for love.

SECTION II.

Preparation for Communion.

"What is there that I ought to do to my vineyard, that I have not done to it." (Isaiah v. 4.) Hear, my soul, what our Lord says to thee. "What could I have done more for thee, than I have done? Was I not born for thy love, in a stable, amidst poverty and misery? Did I not for thy sake, lead a life of continual sufferings? Was I not willing, on thy account, to die upon an infamous cross? Have I not given thee My body to be thy food? What, then, could I have done for thee which I have not done? and yet thou dost still remain insensible to My affection. Ah no, my God; I will no longer resist

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the tenderness of Thy love; this very day I desire to be Thine, entirely Thine. Come, O bread of angels, to heal me; O manna from Heaven, to comfort me! O tenderest of spouses, to support me; O divine love, to inflame me; O Father of goodness to sanctify me!

When the holy old man, Simeon, clasped in his arms the infant Jesus, rejoicing he poured forth this sacred canticle. Now, "O Lord, let me depart in peace, for my eyes have seen the Saviour, whom Thou hast sent for a light to all nations." What would this holy old man have said, if besides seeing Jesus, he had received Him into his bosom? What would have been the transports of his joy, if he could have been fed with His most holy flesh? Would he not truly have been overwhelmed with joy? And canst thou, O christian soul, remain cold and insensible, when thou dost receive Him into thy bosom? Canst thou feed on His most holy flesh, without melting with love; without pouring forth songs and canticles of joy?

When the Blessed Virgin entered into the house of Elizabeth, struck at the wondrous sight, the latter exclaimed, "Whence is this to me, that the mother

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of my God should come to me?" But if a visit from the Mother of God has thus filled holy Elizabeth with admiration, what shall we say when we behold God Himself coming into us, and becoming our food? What sayest thou, my soul, at this thought? Art thou not astonished at beholding such a marvel of love? Art thou not full of wonder, that the God of all Majesty and glory, should condescend to make Himself thy food?

When king Solomon had built the temple of the Lord, filled with astonishment, he cried out, "Is it possible that God should come down and dwell with man upon earth? If the whole extent of Heaven cannot contain Thee, O Lord, how much less this little house which I have built?" What would he have said, if he had seen this great God come and dwell, not now in a majestic temple, but in the narrow and wretched heart of each little worm like man; unite Himself to us, embrace us, and make Himself one with us?

Who am I, O dear Jesus, that I dare to approach this morning Thy holy altar, to receive Thee into my bosom? What am I before Thee, in whose presence the angelic choirs tremble, and the highest

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seraphim veil their faces? How can I dare to approach Thee, who art a God of infinite Majesty and glory?

Dearest Jesus! It was I who, by my sins, crowned Thee with thorns; it was I, who nailed Thee to the cross; it was I who gave Thee gall to drink; it was I who opened Thy side; it was I who caused Thy death. Ah, would that I could die of grief at having offended Thee! I repent, my supreme Good, of having displeased Thee by my evil life. I hope that Thou hast pardoned me, but if not, forgive me now before I approach to receive Thee in Thy divine Sacrament. Wash my soul from all its stains, and make it a habitation worthy of Thy Majesty. Burn, O consuming fire! all within me which is unworthy of Thy presence, all which might be an obstacle to Thy grace, and to Thy holy love. Give me such cleanness and purity as are needed by those who are about to receive Thee, the immaculate Lamb, who takes pleasure in dwelling in pure souls.

Behold, O my soul! the happy moment is arrived in which thou art to receive thy beloved Jesus: that Jesus, who for thy love, was born an infant in the stable at Bethlehem: that Jesus,

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who for thy sake was nailed to a cross; that same Jesus, who is sitting all glorious at the right hand of God! How is it that thou art so insensible when He is coming to thee, who is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Friend, the Master, the Spouse, the joy of Heaven, the delight of Paradise! Ah, this abundance of the divine mercy should kindle thy heart with heavenly fire! If thou hadst but once in thy life to communicate, with what fervour wouldst thou do it? And now, when by the divine bounty, thou art always at liberty to do so, why art thou thus tepid and dissipated at approaching Him? Ah, if thou wert truly burning with divine love, thou wouldst be consumed by a desire of receiving Him, and long after Him, as the hart longeth after a fountain of water. O my soul, wish and sigh for this supreme good, call for it with tears and say, "Come, oh divine food, to nourish my languid soul; come, oh furnace of charity, to inflame my heart; come, oh fire of love, to consume me; come, oh Heavenly Shepherd, to guide me; come, light of souls, solace of hearts, consolation of the afflicted; come, joy of angels, delight of Heaven, happi-

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ness of saints; my treasure, my life, my good, my peace, my all!

Most holy Virgin, from your hands I desire to receive your and my beloved Jesus. Present Him to me as you did to the Shepherds, to the Magi, and to holy Simeon. Tell Him that I am your servant, that He may clasp me to His bosom, and communicate His graces to me, in the greatest abundance.

SECTION III.

Thanksgiving.

At length I have satisfied my desires, fulfilled my vows, and satiated my longing aspirations! The God of Heaven has come to visit me; He is within me, He is all mine. O infinite goodness! O infinite love! O infinite condescension! A God within my breast, resting in my heart! A God! What, O my soul, art thou doing now, that thou art united thus to Jesus? Ah, this is no time to be idle and distracted; but one rather to call upon God for all the graces thou needest. Now are the Heavens open; now the

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eternal Father, with eyes of love fixed upon thee, regards the object of all His love, resting in thy bosom; now whilst most holy Mary, the angels thy holy advocates, are demanding grace of God for thee, keep thyself recollected in Him; unite thy affections to Him, clasp Him to thy heart, adore Him, saying to Him, "Thou art welcome, oh my adorable God, Thou art welcome to the house of my soul! Ah, what hast Thou seen in my soul to make Thee willing to nourish me? What has induced Thee to take up thy dwelling in so unworthy a creature as I am? I would say with St. Peter, 'Depart from me, O adorable Saviour, I am unworthy that Thou shouldest lodge under my roof.' Go and take up thine abode in some pure fervent soul, which is melting in flames of holy love. But no, my only good, go not away from me, for if Thou dost depart from me I am lost. O God, my treasure, my hope, my joy, I love Thee! I possess Thee, my supreme good, I press Thee to my heart, I desire to live and to die in Thy embrace. I love Thee, sweetest Jesus, and because I love Thee I am resolved to keep Thy holy law: because I love Thee, I am inconsol-

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able with grief, for having offended Thee; because I love Thee, I am resolved to make atonement for all the offences which I have committed against Thee. What creature shall ever be able to snatch me from Thee, my only God, and hinder me from loving Thee? Thou only being my shield and my defence, I shall fear nothing. I fear not a life of tribulation; I fear not death. To live or to die is gain for me, for living or dying I shall give Thee glory, and increase in Thy holy love."

Since, O beloved Jesus, Thou hast come into my soul, to heal all its infirmities, deliver me from the tyranny of my evil habits.....which Thou knowest so well. Banish them, oh my beloved, root them out, disperse them from my heart, and substitute in their place the blessed seeds of virtue. I seek not the goods of earth, neither honours, nor pleasures, nor wealth; I ask through the merits of Thy passion, a great, and deep hatred of every sin. Give me Thy light by which I may know the vanity of the world, and how much Thou dost merit to be loved with all my heart, and with all my strength. Detach me from all terrestrial affections, and bind me with Thy holy

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love, so that my will may desire nothing but what Thou wilt. Give me patience and resignation in adversities, and in all the things which are contrary to my self-will. Give me meekness towards all who offend, or despise me. Let not any earthly object cause me to alter my present resolutions, or render me unfaithful to Thy holy love. Finish the work Thou hast begun in me, and sanctify me daily more perfectly. Place a guard upon my lips, that no word may ever escape them which savours of detraction, indecency, anger, pride, and falsehood. Keep a watch over these eyes, which have been so blessed as to see Thee concealed under the humble species of bread, that no improper glances may ever proceed from them; but let them now and for ever weep bitterly over all the offences they have committed against Thy supreme Majesty. Bless my heart in which Thou hast taken up Thy habitation, and fill it continually with Thy grace. Let me not, O Lord, be ever separated from Thee: give me the grace always to recollect Thy benefits; always to appreciate Thy maxims; always to imitate Thine example; that so I may live and die in Thy holy grace, and reign

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eternally with Thee in the blessed mansions of Heaven.

(Here apply yourself to demand some especial grace for yourself and your neighbours, for the living and the dead.)

O most holy Mary, my Mother and my hope, obtain for me the graces which I need, and above all, obtain that I may be delivered from all sin, and be brought to eternal happiness.

O soul of Christ! sanctify me; body of Christ, save me; blood of Christ, inebriate me; water, flowing from the side of Christ, purify me; passion of Christ, comfort me; O good Jesus, hear me; hide me in Thy wounds; let me never separate myself from Thee; from the malignant enemy, defend me; in the hour of my death, call me; let me come to Thee, to praise Thee together with the saints and angels, for ages of ages. Amen.

(Here it is well to repeat this prayer frequently, to which many indulgences are attached.)

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SECTION IV.

Devout Acts, which may be made either before or after Communion.

What more remains for Thee to do, beloved Jesus, that I may love Thee? What more couldst Thou invent to oblige me to love Thee? Alas, unhappy me! during my past life I have loaded Thee with insults, as if Thou hadst been my worst enemy. Unhappy me! who for a wretched pleasure have renounced Thy grace, and thrown off the yoke of Thy holy law. Ah, have pity on this miserable wretch who penitently implores Thy clemency. I love Thee, O beloved Jesus! I love Thee, my treasure, my only good, my life, and my all. Ah, if I had died when I was in mortal sin, I could never have loved Thee more! I thank Thee, dear Jesus, who hast endured me so long, that I might at length love Thee. Take possession, O beloved of my whole heart, detach it from all earthly affections, and make it all Thine own. Happy me, if by the help of Thy grace, I could at length renounce all earthly satisfactions, to attend solely to please Thee,

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my only and supreme good. Happy me, if I could forget all things else, remembering only Thee, and Thy holy law. What is the world? What are riches? What are pastimes? What are honours? What are pleasures? My heart is made for Thee alone, and to Thee alone do I give it. Take possession of it then, Thou who art its centre, its peace, its happiness. Thou art sufficient for me, and art of more value to me than the whole world.

Ah, how unjust have I been to my heart, in loving creatures so much, instead of the Creator. Ye goods of earth, expect nothing from me but contempt. Faithless creatures! expect nothing from me but indifference: I have loved you long enough; in future, I will love only my sweetest and most beloved Jesus. Ah, yes, my Jesus, I will love Thee. Punish me, revenge Thyself on me, but do not abandon me, do not take from me Thy holy love. O consuming fire, consume in me all sinful affections, and give me a true hatred for the crimes by which I have insulted Thy goodness. Ah, with Thy own merits, O my only good, pierce me, bind me, fasten me, unite me entirely to Thine heart. I am resolved, by Thy

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grace, to do every thing to please Thee, and to tread under foot all human respect; to subdue all perverse inclinations; to renounce everything which may prevent my being entirely conformed to Thy will. O love of God, drive out of my heart all other love.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

SECTION I.

The excellence of the Mass.

The Mass is a mystical renewing of the passion and death of our divine Redeemer; so that by hearing Mass, we find ourselves actually present at the great sacrifice in which our Lord really and truly offers Himself to His eternal Father, a holy and spotless victim. All the difference between this sacrifice and that upon the cross, consists only in the manner in which it is offered; for on Calvary Jesus shed His blood actually; in the Mass He only does it mystically.

Whoever, therefore, assists at Mass, assists at the immolation of the Son of God; He sees in substance, all that

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Jerusalem witnessed; what the Jews beheld; what was contemplated amidst the bitterest agony by His sorrowful Mother on the Cross. Here think, O christian soul, how great should be your care to hear Mass every day devoutly. St. Francis of Sales calls it the sea of spiritual exercises; the centre of the christian religion; the heart of devotion; the soul of piety; the ineffable mystery, in which is comprehended the depths of divine charity; the means by which God communicates to us most munificently His graces and His favours.

Those Christians who are so fortunate as to make pilgrimages to the Holy Land, as soon as they descry it from a distance, prostrate themselves on the ground, reverencing and saluting it with a voice of joy; they are filled with deep sentiments of respect towards those spots whereon so many mysteries were accomplished by a God-Man. When they have reached the ground, and find themselves amid those holy scenes and associations, they are unceasing in making acts of love and compunction, and kiss with the greatest affection and religious recollection that earth, which so many ages ago was saturated with His divine blood. In every

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street, on every hill, in every Church, in all places, they seem to see the Lord's humanity, and everywhere they adore Him with the greatest affection of heart.

How many labour to obtain a certainty of the place where Jesus appeared visibly; where He taught the crowds; where He suffered; and where Hi death was consummated. What, then, should be our devotion when we recollect, that in the holy sacrifice of the Mass is offered this very body, this very blood, this very Jesus, who offered Himself on Calvary? Is our altar less worthy of veneration than the stable of Bethlehem? Is our tabernacle less holy than the sepulchre at Jerusalem? Ah, Christians during Mass should wear the semblance of angels; angels in modesty, angels in affection, angels in the fire of charity, in which they should be melted and consumed, as Jesus Christ is immolated and consumed for their sake.

SECTION II.

Pious Reflections useful for hearing Mass with proper dispositions.

Endeavour, O devout soul, whilst you are at Mass, to accompany these few short reflections with devout sentiments,

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and the tenderest affections of your heart. Should you find yourself particularly moved by any of them, go no further; there let your heart rest and expand itself, for the end and effect of prayer is gained.

BEFORE MASS COMMENCES.

I believe, O my God, that in this sacrifice of the Mass is renewed that sacrifice which Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross. I believe that this renewal is made for the exaltation of Thy holy name, for the sanctification of the just, and for the conversion of sinners.

Father of mercy, purify my heart, before I present myself at this holocaust of Thy immaculate Lamb. Far from me be every earthly thought, now that I am about to assist at the most stupendous work of Thy infinite goodness and mercy. Blessed Mary, my dearest mother, obtain for me the grace of assisting at this holy rite with sentiments of piety and devotion, similar to those with which thou wert impressed during thy sorrowful attendance at the sacrifice on the cross of thy most beloved Son. Obtain for me a large share of the graces which are ever

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imparted to those who devoutly assist at this tremendous sacrifice.

AT THE CONFITEOR.

Behold, O Lord, here, at Thy adorable feet, is the traitor who has so frequently risen up against Thee. How ungrateful have I been to Thy love! I am sensible of, and detest my iniquities. But, at the same time, I am aware of, and charmed with, Thy goodness. Is my malice equal to Thy mercy? Oh no! Thy mercy surpasses, in an infinite degree, the malice of all my sins; let it, then, plentifully descend upon me, and endue me with a contrite and humble spirit.

AT THE KYRIE ELEISON.

My miseries, O Lord, are become the grand object of Thy mercy; the greater my misery, the greater is the title I have to the gifts of Thy goodness. Ah! my Lord, have pity upon me; Jesus, have mercy. Thou hast always been clement to the most abandoned sinners.

AT THE EPISTLE.

I thank Thee, O Divine Spirit, who

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hast been pleased to speak to me through the medium of the prophets and apostles, grant that I may profit by Thy instructions lest at the day of judgment they be brought against me, to my confusion and severe condemnation.

AT THE GOSPEL.

Oh! how greatly am I indebted to Thee, O dear Jesus, for having called me to the divine light of Thy gospel! What would all other gifts avail me, unless accompanied by the precious treasure of a lively faith? Adorable faith! I will live in thy bosom, and would gladly lay down my life for thy glory. Be far from me all human respect. The doctrine of the Gospel, not the maxims and practice of the world, shall henceforward guide my conduct, and be the subject of my glory and delight. Further, I hate this deluding and deluded world, which hated Jesus Christ.

AT THE OFFERTORY.

I adore Thee, O my God, and, in union with the priest, offer to Thee this sacrifice, for Thy honour and glory, in thanksgiving for all the benefits conferred upon

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myself, and upon the whole world, and in satisfaction for my many sins, and the sins of other men. Accept, O Lord, of this holocaust, which is no other than Thy divine Son, at once made priest and victim, offering and offerer. Apply His saving merits abundantly to my needy soul. Be comforted, O my heart, Jesus sacrifices Himself for thee.

AT THE ORATE FRATRES.

The creature can offer nothing to the Creator which is worthy of His acceptance. However, I unite myself to the sacrifice of Jesus, which is the source of all merit; I desire nothing but through Him. O God of mercy, I seek nothing but Thy love. Graciously accept of the sacrifice of my heart, and of my whole self, and may it, like the sacrifice of Jesus, be pleasing to Thee, and unite us to Him.

AT THE PREFACE.

My soul, thou art not created for this earth, but for heaven; raise, then, thy thoughts and affections on high; endeavour, for once, to be no longer of the earth, earthly, but of heaven, heavenly.

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My heart beats for Thee, O fountain of every blessing; Thou art for ever my only treasure, Thou alone art the true and sovereign good, besides Thee all is vanity and lies, illusion and deceit.

AT THE SANCTUS.

O God! Thou art holy, and I am a sinner. Heaven and earth are full of Thee, whilst my poor soul presents nothing but a fearful void. Fill me with Thyself, that I may become wholly Thine. Thou commandest me to be holy, enable me to become so by Thy grace. Confiding in Thee, I would exclaim, with an undaunted hero of Christianity, "I am determined to be a saint, a great saint, and that soon."

AT THE MEMENTO FOR THE LIVING.

Thou, O Lord, art our common Father, let, then, all Thy children experience the beneficial effects resulting from Thy unbloody sacrifice. May Thy spouse, the holy Catholic Church, be exalted; grant seasonable aid to its visible head, the Sovereign Pontiff; may all heresies be extirpated, and may Christian princes

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ever live at peace. To Thy fatherly protection I commend our pastor, our sovereign, and the kingdom; my family, parents, benefactors, friends, and enemies, and all for whom I am, in justice, gratitude, or charity, bound to pray.

AT THE CONSECRATION.

O my God, change my earthly affections into Thy holy love, as Thou dost convert the bread into Thy body, and the wine into Thy blood. Grant me the grace to consecrate to Thee my whole soul, my body, and my life.

AT THE ELEVATION OF THE HOST.

I adore Thee, my Jesus, here made an offering of propitiation for us, grant that my heart may be made an oblation, pure, holy, and pleasing in Thy sight.

AT THE ELEVATION OF THE CHALICE.

O Jesus, I adore in the chalice Thy most precious blood, poured forth on the cross for our salvation, may it descend upon my soul to sanctify and purify it. Eternal Father, remember that as the

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blood of Abel cried out against the murderer Cain, so, on the contrary, this blood of the new Abel loudly pleads for mercy in our favour. O blood of my Saviour, O wounds of my Lord, O Jesus my God, be my refuge and support for ever.

AT THE MEMENTO OF THE DEAD.

Remember, O Lord, that the souls in purgatory, which Thou dost punish as a judge, are Thy spouses, Thy beloved children; may they, then, experience the beneficial effects of this unbloody sacrifice, and may such in particular as have claims upon my charity and gratitude, find a speedy deliverance.

AT THE PATER NOSTER.

Thou, then, O ineffable God, art our Father! Father because Thou hast created us, Father because Thou hast redeemed us by Thy blood, Father because Thou dost preserve us by Thy omnipotence; O grant, that seeking only Thy glory, we may become children worthy of so great a Parent. For Thee was I created, and I desire to live only for Thee.

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AT THE DOMINE NON SUM DIGNUS.

God alone is worthy to receive a God, how, then, can a sinful soul like mine be found worthy to receive Him? But Thou, O Lord, dost not regard my unworthiness, but Thy mercy. Thou wilt have me to approach Thee as a sick man to his physician, to be healed; as a poor man to his liberal benefacter, to be enriched. O God of love, behold the poorest and most infirm of all Thy creatures prostrate at Thy feet; unite me to Thyself, and in Thy sight I shall become the greatest and the richest of all. Work this prodigy, so worthy of Thy omnipotence and charity. Come into my heart, take possession of my soul, and, since I cannot have the happiness of really receiving Thee in the Eucharist, enter my soul by means of Thy holy grace, and never let me be separated from Thee; grant that I may live and die in Thy love.

(Here make a spiritual communion.)

AFTER THE COMMUNION.

Thou, my Jesus, hast consummated the sacrifice of Thy body and blood, the

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same in substance to that which Thou didst consummate on the cross, in obedience to Thy heavenly Father, grant that I too may give my life as a victim sacrificed to Thy glory, and immolated to Thy holy will. I wish for nothing but what may be according to Thy good will and pleasure, and I desire to live and die in the manner most conformable to Thy sacred appointment.

AT THE END OF MASS.

I thank Thee, O Lord, for having permitted Thy most unworthy creature to take part in a work which is the masterpiece of Thy omnipotence. Pardon, O Lord, pardon all my negligence; grant that, strengthened by virtue of the merits of Thy beloved Son, and our Lord Jesus Christ, I may find admittance into the most august temple of Thy heavenly kingdom, and there be wholly inflamed with the fire of Thy love, by which the soul lives eternally in God, and God in the soul. Amen.

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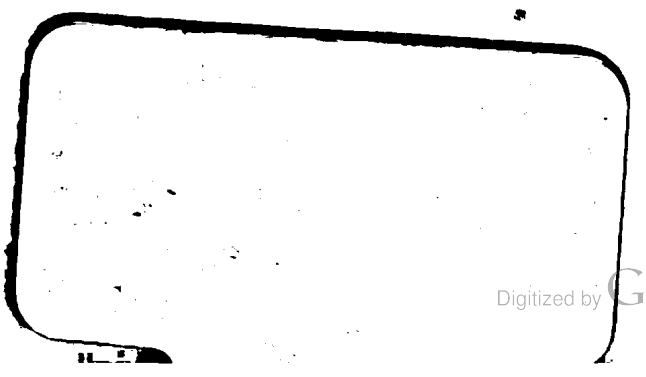
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